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March 19, 1895.

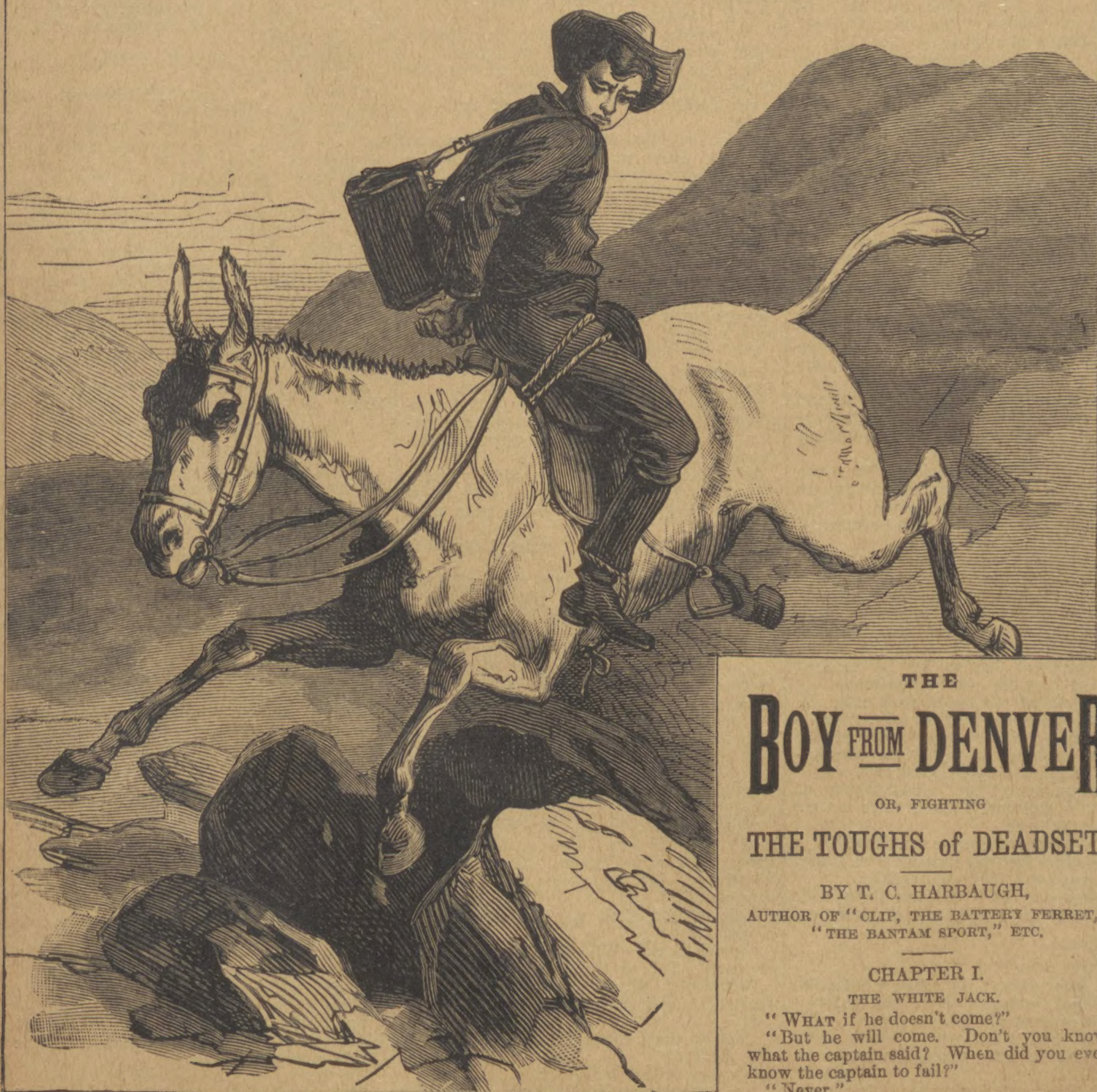
No. 921.

\$2.50
a Year.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS.
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 cents.

Vol. XXXVI.



THE BOY FROM DENVER

OR, FIGHTING

THE TOUGHS of DEADSET.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,
AUTHOR OF "CLIP, THE BATTERY FERRET,"
"THE BANTAM SPORT," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE WHITE JACK.

"WHAT if he doesn't come?"

"But he will come. Don't you know what the captain said? When did you ever know the captain to fail?"

"Never."

"Well, then the boy will be here by-and-by as sure as two and two make four."

THE BOY FROM DENVER UTTERED A CRY WHICH HE COULD NOT SUPPRESS
AS THE ANIMAL BOUNDED FORWARD.

"The train is due at Neverfail at eight, eh?"

"Eight ten, to be precise. If he walks fast, and he is as nimble as a squirrel, he will be here in about——"

"Hist! Some one is whistling down the path now."

The three men who stood in the shadows of a lot of bowlders that strong hands had piled up alongside the mountain road, stopped and leaned forward.

The night was a little cool, with fleecy clouds skurrying across the face of a watery moon. Back of them rose the tall cliffs of the Dead Man's Mountains, while down the winding road the trees lost themselves among the deeper shadows of wooded slopes.

The three stood in a secluded place, some miles from the nearest station of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad, and had been there some time.

They looked like men one would not care to meet in a lonely spot, powerful fellows with bronzed visages and beards of the same hue, and clad in garments which told that they were none of the best "citizens," even in that wild region.

Yes, some one was whistling down the road, and the trio stood and listened while they looked at one another.

"It is the boy," decided one, at last.

"And on time to a second. The Captain knew."

"He always knows," was the confident assumption, and the speaker ran one hand beneath his gray shirt.

"There is to be no one hurt, you know," admonished one of his companions.

"I know that. Nothing but a ride on the White Jack."

All three men laughed and waited, like Indians in their ambush.

Meantime, approaching them from the south was a boy, walking with easy step and head poised as one without fear, despite the wildness of the place.

He was dressed in a good brown suit and carried over his shoulder, by a strap, a little valise which evidently had seen a deal of service.

He did not appear to be armed, but there was no telling what he carried underneath his blouse, and in that locality he certainly needed more than physical powers when it came to defending himself.

If he could have seen the three ruffians in ambush he might have fallen back or taken the road to the right which led down into a valley, covered with fir, where he could have lost himself, in a few minutes' run.

But it was not thus to be. He reached the line of bowlders to be confronted by the men, all of whom stepped into the moonlight and stood side by side, their elbows touching while they surveyed the boy, who stopped as he beheld the six-shooters which the men had drawn.

"You're on time, I see," observed one of the men, a stalwart fellow, with a scar above his left eye.

"You've been waiting for me, then?"

"Never mind just what we've been doing. You've come and that's enough."

The boy continued to look them over from head to foot, when one suddenly exclaimed:

"Shell out!"

"Shell out what?"

"Why, the papers; in other words, the last will and testament of Colonel Quartz."

The lad started visibly.

"I can't shell it out when I don't carry such a thing upon my person," was the retort.

"Bah! You can't beat us in that manner. We know what you said you would do when you came to Deadset, and we

know that the will was handed over to you in Denver."

"Then," smiled the boy, "then you know more than I do."

The trio, exchanging glances, suddenly "covered" the boy by three revolvers, which were held dangerously close to his face.

"The will or a ride," said all three in unison.

"A ride?"

"Yes, down the valley and over the hills to the last camp."

"I don't understand you."

"You will if you don't shell out! Open that valise!"

The lad took the valise from his shoulder and opened it.

"If there's a will here you can have it," he declared, promptly. "Don't you think I would be foolish to be running over the country with such a thing as a valuable will in my possession?"

"But you have it all the same. We haven't been tipped wrongly. The Captain knows what he's about, and when he sent us word that you would be here——"

"The Captain, eh?"

"Of course. Come, we can't stay here all night parleying. We want the papers."

The boy was now indignant, for his eyes flashed and his face crimsoned.

He appeared on the eve of resisting them.

All at once two of the three sprang upon him, and before resistance was possible, he was pinioned by their iron grip.

"We'll search him," said one. "We'll see just what he has and then—then for the journey on the White Jack!" So while one of the ruffians held him the other "went through him" with not very gentle hands.

His pockets were turned wrong side out in a jiffy, his coat was taken off and thrown upon the ground, and his valise was emptied.

But they found no papers, much to their chagrin, and the boy was permitted to resume his coat and reclaim his valise.

By this time one of the three had vanished, but soon came back, leading a splendid white mule whose symmetry was distinguishable in the moonlight.

The animal was unmistakably vicious, and when brought near the boy he drew back, with eyes that seemed to snap with evil intent.

"Tie his hands, Merle," ordered the leader of the trio.

"Don't send me out into that wild unknown land down there," pleaded the boy with a shudder; and then, as if ashamed of having asked for mercy, he straightened, and eyed the three with unflinching gaze.

They tied his hands upon his back; they re-slung the valise and lifted him upon the back of the White Jack.

The animal, of course, rebelled, but, with skilled fingers, the ruffians bound the boy's feet to the mule's sides and turned his face toward the white tail.

"Who told you to do all this?" demanded their victim.

"You'll never know, for you're going down into Death Valley, and probably through Disaster Canyon. Who told us to do all this? Ah, there's the rub." And all three laughed.

"All of you shall pay for this night's work!"

"We shall, eh? Who is to be your avenger, pray? Tell us that, sonny!"

"Time will tell you that; rest assured the reckoning will come to each and all of you."

"Bet on that! Now tell us where you've hid the will."

The boy smiled derisively.

"A pretty time to ask for a secret like that!" he exclaimed. "If I were the legatee of Colonel Quartz, as you intimate, do

you suppose I would play into your ruffianly hands?"

"Give White Jack the whip, Tony."

Tony, the shortest of the three, a man with broad shoulders and frowning brows, picked up a whip that lay at his feet, but did not strike.

"Give him the lash, I say."

The leather thong descended upon the animal's haunches; the rein was released, and away went the snowy mule like an arrow released from a bow.

The boy Mazeppa uttered a cry which he could not suppress as the animal bounded forward.

"It's your day; to-morrow may be mine!" he cried to the villains, who watched his departure with fiendish glee. "Link Lucky will live to pay all of you back, and with compound interest."

It is doubtful if they heard the words, for the hoofs of the mad White Jack were striking fire from the flints in the mountain path, and half a minute later the new Mazeppa was out of sight.

A bend in the road had hid him from his persecutors, and the moon, passing behind a cloud, covered the ground with a pall of shade.

"What was that he said just then?" asked one of the three.

"I don't know, but something about paying us back, I think."

"That boy? Yes, he will! Why, he has no more chance of escape than a fish has to cross the sandy desert. Pay us back! Well, that's good enough to take to the Captain."

They all laughed again and turned away, while the frightened White Jack, with his unwilling rider, was bounding over the rough ground like a mad steed.

The ruffians had spoken of Death Valley and Disaster Canyon, and Link Lucky, or Lucky Link, as he was known by his fellows, might be doomed to perish in that dread district, shunned alike by man and beast.

Apparently the boy's luck had deserted him.

CHAPTER II.

MINA.

About the hour of the boy's start upon what was to be the most terrible experience of his life, a man, well dressed and handsome, entered a house which occupied a prominent place on one of the best streets of a mining town not far from the scene of Lucky Link's capture.

This person had passed the fortieth milestone of life, was well built, stalwart in fact, and had a pair of keen black eyes which at times could flash with venomous cruelty.

He was the best known man in Deadset, the name of this mountain town.

Deadset had sprung into existence in a night, as it were; had come up from a lot of poor land, and had stretched out along the mountain with its houses and cabins, and its homes of its mining nabobs.

The occupant of the room, which was even elegantly furnished for that locality, sat alone for some time.

At last the door at one side of the chamber opened and there glided in an Indian dressed in civilized garb, but dark of face, like all his tribe.

This Indian was lithe and young; he had a fine face, which fairly glistened with subtlety; and as he came forward, he bowed to the white man, but immediately straightened and stood like a statue, in the middle of the room.

For half a minute the white man eyed him without speaking; and then he asked: "No news yet, Sam?"

The Indian shook his head.

"It is nearly time to hear from the boys," and the speaker consulted his watch. "They ought to be back now."

"Mebbe boy no come yet."

"If the train was on time he should have met the boys. There is the message," and Captain Grip, the gold-bug of Deadset, picked a bit of yellowish paper from the table and handed it to the red-man.

"What says the paper?" queried the Indian.

"Why, it tells me that he started from Denver on time—was on the train when it pulled out and had the paper with him."

"They'll get it, then."

"That's what they're on the mountain for," was the business-like retort. "Three men ought to be enough to get ahead of a young rat like little Lucky."

A grin came to the lips of Shooting Sam, as he was called, and for a little while he looked away, apparently thinking of the mountain wolves and the boy from Denver they were to devour.

"It's just this way, Sam," continued Gordon Grip. "You see, the last will and testament of one Colonel Quartz, if carried out in detail, renders us uncomfortable here."

"That would be bad, Cap'n."

"Of course. It would cause me to shut up this elegant establishment, where I thought I was settled for a term of years, if not for life, and go back to the pick."

"It shan't do that."

"Not if the boys catch the young one in the mountains on his way from the station to Deadset. There is where the rub is. They must intercept him or we are lost."

Shooting Sam leaned forward and held his breath, while his eyes appeared to flash.

"I know what you would do if you could," Captain Grip went on. "You wouldn't let the youngster get very far toward Deadset with the document. You'd leave him for the vultures."

"Sam would see him at the blackbirds' mercy. He would show the boy that he cannot carry a will against Captain Grip very far."

"You're worth your weight in gold, Sam! I know that. I didn't send you out upon the trail because I thought I might want you here, in case the boy gave the men the slip and got here unannounced."

"But they won't let him get by."

For a little while the white man sat silent, his eyes looking at the Indian, who had fallen back to the wall, where he stood with folded arms.

"Here they come, now," suddenly cried the white man. The Indian turned his head and listened.

There were voices on the outside and both men awaited, breathlessly, for the door to open.

When it did open, there was standing on the threshold, not the leader of the three braves sent to intercept Lucky Link in the mountain, but a young girl whose face was pretty and white.

"It's Mina!" said the young Indian, drawing back with a hurried look at his master.

The girl advancing, stopped in the middle of the room, eyed half-savagely by Captain Grip.

"Well," said he gruffly. "What is it?"

Before answering, she darted an uneasy look toward the Indian; then stepped up to the table.

"Dot sent me —"

"She did, eh?" came roughly from the man. "You know where the door is, girl, if she sent you."

But, there was no movement on the girl's part; on the contrary, she seemed disinclined to depart, as ordered.

At mention of the name "Dot" the Indian had taken a step forward, but a quick glance from his master warned him to pause.

"Dot sent me," continued the girl—a maiden of seventeen, with a willowy figure

which was grace itself, and deep blue eyes, which looked sparkled as she spoke.

Captain Grip did not speak for a second.

"Well, what did Dot say?" he asked, at length.

"She sent you this," and a folded paper was dropped before the white man; but he made no move to pick it up.

Mina drew back and looked at him searchingly.

"I said I wouldn't read anything from her—not a word. She knows what my ultimatum is, and she has sense enough to know that notes or words are useless."

Still the folded paper looked up at him and he looked down at it with a sort of mental challenge, which was not accepted.

"Perhaps you had better read what Dot says," suggested the quiet girl.

"I will, but not that I have retreated from my position an inch," was the answer.

He raked the paper toward him and opened it. Then he leaned back in his chair and let his eyes run over the writing thus disclosed.

The stolid Indian waited for orders, as his face indicated. He was ready to obey Captain Grip in every particular, and all he wanted was a lifted finger or a nod.

Captain Grip's color came and went while he perused the letter, which was brief; then, looking up, said, with less asperity in voice and manner:

"You may tell that woman—may tell Dot that I will see her."

The blue eyes seemed to dance. They got a gay light and for a moment appeared to change color.

"Yes, I will see her," he went on. "I will see her at ten to-morrow."

The girl looked disappointed.

"I thought Dot was expecting an interview yet to-night," she remarked.

"That she can't have, for there's other business on hand. I will see her at ten to-morrow. 'Tis the best I can do. Shall I write out my answer?"

"No; I will tell Dot."

The girl moved to the door, but pausing there, looked, first at Captain Grip, then at his Indian.

"What is it, girl?"

"Why do you keep that man near you?" she asked, suddenly covering the Indian with her finger. "Don't you know that 'tis said he has killed a woman?"

"How's that, Sam?"

Captain Grip had turned to his servant with a grin of viciousness with which was mixed no little merriment.

"You have heard what she says. You've been killing women, have you? Come! I thought I had educated you above that. You must look out, sir!"

All this was a mock reproof, as the girl well knew.

As for Shooting Sam, he stepped away from the wall, his eyes flashing with momentary passion; but he checked himself, for he fell back again and resumed his old position.

"You are a great man here, Captain Grip; you are the richest man in Deadset, and there is no limit to your riches; but you keep strange people around you, and that murderer is one of them," and with this reminder Mina glided out.

"She shows her teeth like a dog," grated Shooting Sam, springing to the door and jerking it open. "I'll show the little thing that she can't snarl all the time and not get bitten."

Outside the moon was shining and the Indian was fully revealed as he sprang from the house.

The girl was but a few feet away and turned at the opening of the door.

They stood alone in the moonshine, face to face, and Mina was holding in her hand something that caught and held the moon-gleams like a mirror.

"You are nothing but a common murderer," said she, looking over the levelled revolver at the Indian. "You killed a woman in Lone Canyon last summer, and with her blood on your hands you parade the streets of Deadset and become the servant of its nabob. Time will come when there will be a settlement for that crime, and when a noose will lengthen your red neck!"

Shooting Sam made no reply, for the revolver was more than menacing; so it was with a thrill of delight that he saw one of three men who came down the street spring forward and rudely seize the girl from behind.

"What was she trying to do?—shoot you, Sam?" asked the stalwart captor.

"She was only showing off. Let her go, Merle! The Captain wants to see you."

Mina was instantly released, and Shooting Sam held open the door for the three men who had come back from capturing Lucky Link on the mountain trail to pass into the presence of their employer.

CHAPTER III.

THE FRIEND IN RED.

The White Jack was an animal of speed and great endurance.

He was known in many localities, and there were those who had offered goodly sums of money for him, vicious as he was.

Down the mountain trail and across the valley that lay beyond the foothills went the white mule, carrying to dangerous and ill-omened regions the hapless but undaunted Boy from Denver.

Lucky Link could move but little. True, his upright body had not been tied, and he could look over his shoulders and catch a faint glimpse of the valley into which he was descending.

The moon shone clearly for some time after his release by the three ruffians, but at length it became obscured, and still the mad steed rushed on and on through the darkness.

Where would the wild ride end? The boy still recalled the names Death Valley and Disaster Canyon which his captors had mentioned. Was he in the one, and would he in due time reach the other?

Was a horrible fate awaiting, at the end?

The White Jack seemed the very embodiment of endurance, for he maintained his powers and pushed on and on, until the stars seemed to be pointing to the dawn of another day.

The boy Mazeppa knew that he was far from Deadset, his prearranged destination, and equally far from the railroad.

More than once he listened for the shriek of the locomotive, but it came not to his ears.

Then suddenly the White Jack stopped and drew back, with a wild snort.

Terror seemed to have suddenly taken possession of the animal, and Link looked down the trail before him.

"What is it?" thought the alarmed boy.

Coiled on the ground, which was quite bare at that point, lay a snake, its hideous head uplifted and its pretty skin shining in the last glimmer thrown from the vanishing moon.

The White Jack had caught sight of the deadly mountain rattler and had drawn back, warned by its rattle.

There stood the mule, quivering in every limb with almost human terror, and Link looked down at the serpent and wondered what next was to happen, when, with another snort, which was a challenge, the white steed sprang forward, and the next moment was trampling the snake to death underneath its sharp hoofs, while Link had to look on and silently applaud the little white's bravery!

The serpent left a mass of blood and

mangled flesh in the trail, while the White Jack dashed on again!

The terrible ride was fast telling upon the boy Mazeppa.

His one position had brought pains to every part of his body. He felt his muscles grow sore beneath the tension of the bonds, and his face grew pale and haggard.

It was a long, long night; minutes seemed hours; but, like all nights, it had an ending.

The first long streaks of daylight shot athwart the low lands and showed the boy the uninviting region which he had now entered.

It was as uninviting as a desert: a seeming land of desolation!

As the White Jack entered a little valley dotted with clumps of stunted firs, he longed for water. All night he had thirsted, but now the thirst was greater than ever, and his parched mouth and throat told of his sufferings—sufferings which must compel a halt.

The speed was slackened; then it dwindled into a walk, and by and by the animal rested for the first time since setting out upon that insane gallop.

Suddenly something was seen creeping toward a lot of bushes in front of the animal.

It had a human shape, yet, at the same time, it looked very like a skulking wolf.

The boy Mazeppa watched it until it vanished among the firs, and wondered and longed to know what it was.

A minute later that something sprang from the bushes, and, as the pale steed reared back, it developed into an Indian.

But such an Indian!

He was not a full-blood, as the boy, who had seen hundreds of the red race, knew at a glance; but he was blooded enough to be called a savage.

His few garments were ready to drop from his body; his face was long and gaunt with hunger; and, from his shoulders hung the plaited tails of six wolves.

He caught the lines that daggled uselessly from the White Jack's head and held on like grim death.

His strange tongue, which the boy could not understand, was a jabber which, under any other circumstances, would have provoked a smile, but now—

The steed-bound rider looked down into the face of the lone Indian and tried to summon words sufficient to thank him.

He was willing to be saved by anybody, and an Indian's hand at the rein was as good as a white man's.

The red looked up into the boy's face and laid his hand on the thongs that lashed him to the beast.

"You see that I am an unwilling rider," said the boy. "Why don't you cut me loose?"

The Indian, who was young and lithe of figure, laughed again and pointed to his weaponless belt.

"Go to work on the knots!"

The redskin went to work with a will, but soon desisted; the task was too great and his hands too tender.

"You can't, eh?" said Link. "You seem to have good teeth; why not try them?"

The Indian understood, and in an instant he was gnawing at the ropes with the persistence of a hungry hound.

Strand after strand parted!

The Indian's teeth were sound and sharp and seemed to eat their way through the ropes.

The White Jack, patient now, seemed to realize that the Indian was a friend in need, and began to crop the stunted grass that grew about his hoofs.

"Good!" ejaculated the boy, as the last cord fell from his limbs. Then he threw one over the mule's back and sprang to the ground!

But his hands were still tied to his back, and after a moment's pause he presented them to the Indian.

But, to his dismay, the redskin shook his head.

"What, you don't intend to free me?" he cried. "You can't be afraid of a boy rendered weaponless by the men of Captain Grip!"

A sharp cry pealed from the Indian's throat, and, springing at Little Link, he caught his shoulders in the grip of a vise.

The name of the Gold-bug of Deadset had startled him.

"I am Captain Grip's victim. You don't seem to like the wretch," the boy continued. "You have heard of him, no doubt, and I am one of his victims. I was captured by three of his ruffians, who tied me to the white mule and sent me, as they supposed and hoped, to my death in Death Valley or Disaster Canyon."

No longer was the boy compelled to wait for teeth at the last bonds; the keen incisors of the redskin attacked the thongs, and in less than five minutes they fell apart, and the bound wrists separated!

The boy held out his hand to the Indian, who took it, and wound his long fingers about the nerveless fingers of the boy Mazeppa.

"Where am I?" asked Link.

The redskin shook him again and pointed toward the sun.

"Where is Deadset?"

The savage deliverer turned and pointed to the north.

"Is it far?"

"It is miles and miles away, as the white man measures ground."

It was the first time the Indian had spoken.

"You speak English," said the lad, with a smile.

"Red Jack can talk like the hated white man, when he wants to. Deadset is far away."

"But you know the trail thither?"

"I know all the trails of the mountains. I can move about at night with the eye of the owl, and during the day with that of the fox. I can guide the boy back to Deadset, the town of the gold-hunters and the last camp of the Dogs of Darkness."

"The what?" and the boy leaned toward the redskin with a look of mystery.

"You don't know them, eh?" demanded Red Jack. "You don't know them, yet you have mentioned the name of Captain Grip, the nabob of the gold-hills and the fiend of the territory!"

"You know him, do you?"

The Indian sprang to the White Jack and vaulted upon his back before the animal could resent the mount.

"Come!" he cried to Little Link. "The white mule will carry two. It will not be for the first time, either;" and the boy being within reach, he was caught and lifted from the ground with the ease of an athlete.

"You are going back," said Red Jack. "Back to Captain Grip of Deadset!"

CHAPTER IV.

ASSERTING HIS RIGHTS.

Back to Deadset? He had not been there yet, thanks to Captain Grip's ruffians overtaking him on the mountain trail.

The boy looked at the Indian, who had lifted him upon the White Jack, and longed for him to urge the mule forward.

Yes, he was quite willing to go to Deadset!

It was his destination and he was ready to face its magnate—the man to meet whom he had started from Denver, for Captain Grip stood between him and the legacy left him by the will of Colonel Quartz.

The day at last waned and the night came once more.

Though the White Jack made good headway over the trail, carrying double very well, the riders were not yet in sight of the mountain town.

Early next day a dark-faced man with long black hair that fell over his shoulders stood out in the morning light, with arms folded upon his ample chest.

Any one would have recognized him as Shooting Sam, the Indian, and Captain Grip's man. He seemed to be watching the object approaching Deadset from the south.

Nearer and nearer the riders approached him, until he saw the single mule carrying two persons, one almost as dark as himself.

The watching Sam made no sign that he saw anything unusual, and continued to stare at the new-comers, but at last turned and walked toward a house not far off.

He had entrance there at all times, for he opened the door without knocking and strode through a cramped hall to a room where he startled a man who lay upon a long, low couch.

"Get up! The young imp is here!" he announced.

In an instant the occupant of the cot sprang up and stood in the Indian's presence.

"Not the boy they sent down into Death Valley on the White Jack?" he exclaimed.

"No one else," was the reply.

"In the name of Heaven, how came he to get back here?"

"He is riding the Jack."

"Tied?"

"Oh, no; the beast is carrying double and—"

"Carrying double? You don't mean to tell me, Sam, that the White Jack is actually carrying two people, and one of them that boy, to Deadset?"

"Come to the window and look for yourself."

Captain Grip—for he it was—walked to the window that looked south and tore the curtain aside.

"There they are!" said Sam.

The Gold-bug of Deadset looked down the road that led south, out of the camp.

"I see the White Jack, and I'd sooner see Satan," he remarked under his breath.

"Dot, whom I saw yesterday, you know, said that my play would all come to nought, that the person whom I did not expect would turn up with the certainty of bad money and blast all my hopes."

"She told you that, eh?"

"She did; and I said that I would get the best of him, whoever he was."

The mule had now reached the little square in front of Captain Grip's house and his two riders were looking toward the house itself.

The gold-bug turned white and walked from the window.

"It's one of your people with him," he said scarcely above his breath. "He has rescued the boy."

"It may be so."

"Don't you see that it is so? That the Indian must have found him somewhere in Death Valley? Why didn't Merle and his companions make sure of the little intruder?"

Captain Grip went to the farthest wall and, opening a cupboard there, took out a little box, which he opened, with his back to the Indian.

"Go out and tell the boys," he ordered, looking over his shoulder.

"They know it; here's Merle now," and as he spoke the door opened and the tall figure of Merle stood before Captain Grip.

"You've seen 'im?" called out the ruffian, with a grin. "The evil one must have helped the boy—"

"In the person of that Indian out there,"

broke in Captain Grip. "That villain found him somewhere in the Valley or the Canyon and released him. Any fool can see that."

"It is Red Jack," muttered Shooting Sam.

"Your friend Red Jack, eh?" sarcastically said Captain Grip with a start. "Go out there and settle with him now."

The Indian did not move.

"You know what the girl Mina said to you?" continued Gordon Grip. "Are you afraid to meet her?"

"No."

Meantime the two new-comers had dismounted and were walking toward the porch of Deadset's only hotel, if the long house roughly built where strangers were entertained could be thus called.

The boy looked stumpy beside the lithe, arrowy figure of the Indian, Red Jack, and Red Jack himself seemed to walk with all the freedom of a lord of the soil.

"Look at that Indian," grated Merle. "He walks as if he already owns the town. And he is the boy's champion."

Captain Grip said nothing, but merely looked at the sight until Red Jack and the Boy from Denver had reached the hotel.

"It is war from the start now. The young one will try to make good his right to the property left by Colonel Quartz. You say you failed to find the will upon him, Merle?"

"We searched him well. It was not there, then, that is sure."

"He cannot have obtained it since, for certainly it was not down in Death Valley."

"Certainly not."

"Nor pased upon the sides of the cliffs in Disaster Canyon?"

"No."

"How can he make good his right to the mines?" asked Shooting Sam.

"He will try. The will must be in existence. He started out of Denver with it."

"And hid it on the way? Would that be natural, Captain?"

Captain Grip looked puzzled.

"No matter; we must not let that boy triumph," he said with a muttered imprecation.

Young Link had entered the main room of the little hostelry and was already the cynosure of all eyes.

The rough men of the mountain looked at him and passed whispered comments as to his appearance and mission, the latter being guesswork—and now and then smiled at his boyish appearance.

The boy took all this in good part, and did not seem to feel that he attracted more than the usual amount of attention; but, suddenly, he turned to the crowd and looked it over at a single glance.

"Gentlemen," he remarked in a soft voice that did not tell of the fearful ride through the valley and canyon. "I am Link Lucky, and am here to inherit that which has been bequeathed me under the will of the late Colonel Quartz, the founder of Deadset, who departed this life three weeks ago in the city of Denver."

The boy spoke with such unassuming modesty that the stalwart toughs laughed again, for they wondered how such a youth would ever defend the rights he sought.

"I reckon," said one of the men, "that you will have to show the papers for that."

A smile came to Link's face and lingered there a moment.

"That will have to be done," chimed in another voice from the end of the line.

"You see, boy, there is some dispute as to the property owned by the late Colonel Quartz and—"

In an instant the eyes of the Boy from Denver were turned upon the speaker, and he checked his remarks as if a hand had been placed over his mouth.

"I will show all the proofs you re-

quire, when the time comes," answered the legatee. "I am here to say that I have them within reach and that I shall expect to receive from those who have been operating Colonel Quartz's mines during his protracted absence from Deadset a certain percentage of their earnings."

Looks of consternation passed from man to man, for the very boldness of the young claimant was startling.

"You'll have to see Captain Grip about some of them," intimated one of the crowd.

"I will see Captain Grip!"

With this the boy turned away, and with his valise slung over his shoulder, walked up to the counter upon which lay a dirty-backed register which contained some of the queerest names of guests that ever adorned a ledger's pages, and asked where he was to get a room.

Spanish Jim, the little landlord in the frayed plush jacket, looked at him and then at Red Jack.

"We can't accommodate your pard, the red," he announced.

"Red Jack will accommodate himself," smiled young Link. "I am here to stay and may not inhabit any other house than the Black Bear, if I find its accommodations good enough."

"You ought to know the truth, boy," continued Spanish Jim. "This hotel belongs to—to, well, to Captain Grip."

The claimant's eyes seemed to flash, and for a moment they fell beneath the hard gaze of the little man behind the counter.

"To Captain Grip?" he echoed. "I believe this is not a new bit of information. I had a good deal told me before I came down from Denver. Don't this hotel stand north of the old trail?"

"Well, yes."

"I thought so. I guess one has a right to sleep in his own house."

"He has—no one disputes that; but, you see, it's Captain Grip's hotel now; and as you and him in the natural course of events will—"

"We won't argue that out, Spanish Jim," broke in Lucky Link. "All north of the old trail belonged to Colonel Quartz, and it now belongs to me!"

"Pluck to the backbone!" said some one behind the Boy from Denver.

CHAPTER V.

THE EDGE OF A CRISIS.

For half a minute the silence was almost painful.

The Boy from Denver stood at the counter and looked the hard crowd in the face.

Red Jack, the Indian, sidled up to him as if suspecting danger, but not a hand was raised and not a man advanced.

The landlord of the Black Bear leaned over the counter and looked at Link, but said nothing.

"You will give me a room, won't you?"

The man glanced at the crowd ranged along the wall and seemed to wait for its dictum.

"I guess so," said Spanish Jim, at last. "But, of course, if the boss puts in his veto, why—"

"Others may have as much to say as the boss," was the quiet interruption, and the boy, valise in hand, walked toward the door, while Spanish Jim came down the counter.

A swift look passed between Red Jack and the boy heir, and the Indian strolled from the hotel and went to where they had left the White Jack tethered to a post after his long journey over mountain and waste.

"That's our boss!" said a voice, at sound of which the redskin turned and saw facing him a strapping man in dirty jacket and with threatening visage.

It was Tucson Tony, one of the three.

Red Jack had placed his hand on the

bridle and it remained there despite the voice.

"That's our boss, I say," and the rough advanced and looked fiercely at the quiet red who showed not the least sign of resistance.

He seemed to send a swift glance toward the hotel as if looking for help from the boy heir, but Lucky Link was not to be seen.

"Hands off!" thundered Tony, flashing a revolver in the sunlight and suddenly covering the Indian.

Again the eye took in the hotel and seemed to see a signal there, for all at once Red Jack dropped the rein and fell back.

He had given up the White Jack without a struggle, and the big man seemed disappointed.

He evidently preferred a little resistance on the Indian's part, so he could have some excuse for shooting him dead in his tracks, but Red Jack had foiled him.

"You stole that boss!" resumed Tony.

The red's eyes flashed again, but he said nothing.

"You and the boy, I say, stole that boss!"

In another instant there came from behind Tucson Tony a voice that made that individual wheel with the quickness of a panther.

Upon the porch stood the Boy from Denver and in his hand shone something that reflected from its polished surface the rays of the unclouded sun.

"The White Jack was not stolen, as you yourself know," said Lucky Link. "You are one of the three who know that the mule was not stolen, for you caught me in the mountain and tied me, Mazeppa-like, to his back."

Down from the porch stepped the Boy from Denver, and Tony saw him approach with his hand upon the easy trigger.

"I am not here for a fight," continued Lucky Link. "I am here to deny the charge about the mule being stolen. If he is yours, take him; but no ruffian shall heap upon either of us the charges you want to make."

Back of the boy stood the men who had crowded from the hotel in hopes of seeing a fight, but they did not take the big man's part.

If Tony looked to them for sympathy he did not see much of it in their eyes, for they admired pluck wherever found, and Lucky Link, almost friendless in Deadset, was showing a good lot of it.

Sullenly Tucson Tony led the White Jack away mumbling something not intelligible, and when he had vanished at the first turn of the narrow street Lucky Link looked at his pard.

The tall rough went straight to Captain Grip's house.

He left the White Jack at the door and strode across the threshold in his heavy boots.

Captain Grip, Shooting Sam and Merle were still there.

"Did you see the impudence of the kid?" growled Tucson Tony, the moment he caught sight of the trio.

"He cowed you with the gun, eh, Tony?" The man addressed bit his lip.

"What could I do? He had the drop on me and there was shoot in his eyes."

"You might have dropped the Injun first," said Merle.

"And got a bullet in my head the next second!" was the reply. "I don't want one there just yet."

"What have they done?" eagerly asked Gordon Grip.

"The boy has arranged to stop with Jim, at your hotel at that, Captain. He has been assigned to a room, saying as he went to it that the Black Bear might change owners before long, as it was north of the old trail."

"Did he say that, the boy?"

"That's just what he said, and he seemed to mean it."

"Anything about the will?" put in Merle.

"He mentioned that the papers would be ready when they were needed to substantiate his claim to a part of Deadset. He seemed cool and confident."

This information seemed to take Captain Grip's breath; he looked from the window to the square where little groups of men stood discussing the last sensation, and at length turned his face to his friends in the house.

"So," he said; "he's here to fight me?"

"It has that look."

"In the name of thunder, how did you come to overlook the will?"

"We didn't overlook it. He simply hadn't it about him."

"But you say that he says it will be forthcoming when he needs it?"

"He said that."

"He will need it soon, very soon," and the teeth of the gold-bug seemed to bite off the words savagely. "I will force him to show his hand, for we don't intend to surrender up a foot of land nor turn over a dollar on the say-so of that young tiger."

Shooting Sam, the Indian, looked again from the window and a singular light seemed to beam in his dark eyes.

"The white boy is all grit," said he.

"He is as cool as a cool head and he, and if he has fetched Colonel Quartz's will to Deadset, there will be a rumpus."

"There will be more than a rumpus," hissed Captain Grip. "Just think of it, men. Colonel Quartz, whom we thought dead—he had been dead to the world for five years—turns up suddenly in Denver, and, falling in with this boy, who did him some favor somewhere, makes a will giving him the three mines we are working and one-half of Deadset besides, to which he laid claim."

"But he hasn't the old map—the one which shows the original survey and the names of the owners," grinned Merle.

"He can't have the map, for that went up in smoke the night the little shanty burned."

"Of course. Without the parchment map we can defy him even if he has the will." The gold-bug smiled.

"Is Captain Grip sure the map was burnt?" asked Shooting Sam.

"As sure as we are of a ything. It was hidden in the shanty and the whole thing went up in smoke."

"Sam saw it burn. He stood by and saw the fire lick up the little cabin. If map was there it went up in smoke, but Sam thought he saw a dark figure sneaking away from the shanty that night."

"I know you always claimed that," put in Captain Grip, quickly. "I have heard you say that before now. But no one but us knew that the map was there."

The Indian made no reply to this, and his gaze wandered back to the plaza and its groups of dark-shirted men.

"Don't you see we have him right in our hand—thus," and the silken hand of Captain Grip was outstretched and clasped firmly. "We have him there, will or no will. A bold front will scare this blooming youngster out and he will prefer Denver air to Deadset society. A bold front, boys. Captain Grip and the Dogs of Darkness, as they call us, must hold at all hazards what they have in their hands at this time."

This sentiment was echoed by Merle and Tony, but the feature of the Indian did not relax and he seemed soberer than usual.

A boy and his red pard against all Deadset, for all Deadset seemed to belong to Captain Grip!

The handsome man walked back and dropped into a chair at the table.

"I don't believe he has the will at all. It's mere bluff," he said braggingly.

"He has something that he banks on," replied Tony.

"But neither the map nor the will. It can't be."

"But Colonel Quartz left him what he claimed belonged to him?"

"I have that news from Denver. Yes, that is what they say, but he can't possess the property without the map, and that is ashes."

"See here," cried Captain Grip, suddenly springing up. "Let's bring matters to a crisis at once. The hotel belongs to me."

"Jim told the boy that."

"He did, eh? What did he say?"

"He said that one ought to have a right to occupy a room in his own hotel."

The gold-bug of Deadset almost roared with rage. He turned two colors within a minute and seemed about to rush from the house and fetch matters to an immediate head.

"His own hotel, eh?" and he struck the table with his fist. "I want to know who built it and who runs it."

The three men looked on, but did not speak.

"I'll order him out of it! I'll send him word to vacate the room at once. I will bring matters to a focus right away, for this Boy from Denver sha'n't browbeat Captain Grip of Deadset."

"He'll show his hand before long," suggested Merle.

"He's done it now. We know what cards he holds and they are not trumps. We have all there are in the deck. You, Tony, will take the order of vacation to him at once. I'll write it out so that it will be in black and white."

The madman jerked toward him a bottle of ink and picked up a pen. Already he had paper to his hand, and, still in the spasm of rage, he began to write, when a hand fell upon his arm.

He looked up.

Shooting Sam was bending forward.

"What is it?" asked Captain Grip.

"Don't go too fast. Let us look around a little. I did see a figure emerge from the little shanty the night it was burned."

"You've said so before. Who was it?"

"Dangerous Dot, Mina's guardian."

CHAPTER VI.

HOW THE ULTIMATUM WAS RECEIVED.

The name uttered by the Indian seemed to choke Captain Grip.

"You have never told me this before," was his answer.

"You have never pressed Shooting Sam before."

The gold-bug of Deadset caught his breath and was silent for a moment.

"Dangerous Dot?" he was heard to say under his breath. "That woman in the little shanty just before the fire? Can this be true?"

"Well," he went on aloud, "I will send my ultimatum by Tony."

Shooting Sam said no more and fell back to the wall, where, after a manner peculiar to him, he crossed his arms on his chest and remained like a statue there.

Captain Grip wrote rapidly for a few moments, at the end of which time he handed a folded paper to Tucson Tony, who took it with a bow.

"When is it to be delivered?" asked the chosen messenger.

"At once."

"To the boy in person?"

"To the young usurper," was the reply.

"You will hand it to no one but him."

"Shall I wait for his answer?"

"You need not. He will either depart with his red pard or fight us in our kennel."

"He will fight you, sir."

These words came from the lips of Shooting Sam over against the wall and Captain Grip looked at the Indian, but said nothing.

Tony put the demand into his bosom and strode from the room leaving the Captain alone with Merle and the redskin.

The messenger did not expect to have any trouble finding the young heir, for he had just seen him on the plaza before the hotel, and thitherward he bent his steps.

The morning sun had crept toward the zenith through a cloudless firmament and the air was already hot.

Tony looked about him, but saw nothing of the boy, and another look failed to disclose the Indian Red Jack.

But at that moment there emerged from a little cabin down the street the figure of a female.

The woman stopped in the sunshine and seemed to take a survey of Captain Grip's man, who saw her at once.

"It is Dangerous Dot, the woman who hates the Captain and all the rest of us," thought Tony. "She don't belie her name, for she is as dangerous as a rattler, and unless Captain Grip curbs her, she will give him trouble."

She came down the street as he spoke, a woman of thirty-five, with a graceful figure and light step.

Dangerous Dot had a history which, as yet, stood unrevealed to the men of Deadset, and those who knew her best could only conjecture as to what it was.

It was known, however, that she did not like Captain Grip and his followers, and that the dislike was cordially returned so far as the nabob himself was concerned.

The woman seemed to see Tony from the first, and when she came nearer the man moved away, anxious to avoid her.

"Which way, Tony?" she asked.

At the sound of her voice the man started and looked over his shoulder at her.

In another moment she was at his side and her face was turned toward his.

"You have seen the boy, haven't you?" she went on. "Mina has told me something about his arrival. It is said that he is Colonel Quartz's sole heir."

"He says so," replied Tucson Tony. "That is the story the youngster came to Deadset with and —"

"But he says he has the papers that will prove his words, and you know, Tony, if Colonel Quartz really died in Denver with a will in existence which gives all he owned to this boy, Captain Grip will have to vacate."

The tall man was seen to start.

"You are already on the boy's side?"

"I haven't said so," smiled the woman. "I haven't said upon whose side I am. But you ought to know that right is right, and if Colonel Quartz gave this boy the property to which he had a good title who can keep him out of it?"

"Oh, that is to be seen yet," and Tony tossed his head haughtily and ran his brown fingers through his beard.

All the time Dangerous Dot was watching the man like a hawk.

She kept at his side and never took her eyes from him while they walked along toward the hotel.

Perhaps she suspected that Tony was carrying to Lucky Link Captain Grip's decision.

She may have suspected what was in the wind and was determined to see the meeting of the messenger and the doomed boy.

Tony did not look at her again for some time, and then it was with half-averted eyes.

He would have given a good deal if this woman was not at his side.

He wished she did not dog him on such an important mission, but there was no help for it now.

She was there and he had to make the best of a bad situation.

Orders were orders and Tucson Tony resolved to deliver the message if the persistent woman kept at his heels all the way.

He walked straight to the Black Bear, upon whose porch a number of sun lizards were sitting, and thence across it to the reception-room.

Spanish Jim was there.

As Tony entered the room a door at the right opened and there stood the very object of his search, Lucky Link himself.

A little start followed the meeting so far as the tall tough was concerned, and the Boy from Denver seemed to divine the meaning of his presence there.

Tony ran his hand into his bosom, clutched the letter and jerked it forth.

"From Captain Gordon Grip," he said, as he extended the paper, at the sight of which the woman's eyes seemed to flash, while the boy remained cool and collected.

Link opened the note at once and leaned toward the window in at which came the western light that flooded the place.

It was evident that the words traced by Captain Grip were not soft ones.

His sentences were expected to be as sharp as his vocal utterances, as indeed they were, for the letter ran as follows:

"To the Boy from Denver: You are hereby warned not to attempt in any manner to seize upon anything in Deadset said to belong to the late Colonel Quartz. I will not recognize the authority of any writing which you may have brought from Denver or elsewhere, and you are commanded to take yourself from Deadset within twelve hours or feel the hand of Captain Grip and his friends.

"We tolerate no importers and no interlopers. We will not have the peace of Deadset marred by the acts of one who professes to seek that to which he is not entitled; and we will defend to the bitter end by all means in our power the property now in our hands. Be sensible, for this warning will not be repeated and the threat implied herein will be carried out according to the manner of the Kennel.

"CAPTAIN GRIP."

Dangerous Dot saw that the message was one of sharp words, for she had followed the flight of color from the boy reader's face, and thus got at the import of the ultimatum.

What would he do?

Tucson Tony waited with the same show of impatience that marked the woman's face.

He looked at the boy and affected to smile when he looked up from the demand, which he suddenly twisted round his left hand.

"Were you to wait for my answer?" asked Lucky Link.

"Not exactly, but I'm here for a spell if you care to answer it right away."

The figure before Tony seemed to increase in stature, and the boy's face flushed.

"Go back to him and say that I am here to secure what is mine by will and nothing more. I did not come from Denver to interfere with the rights of any one; but to take that which has fallen to me."

"Is that all?"

"Isn't that enough?"

"You mean to fight the Captain."

"That is for the Captain to decide."

"You don't know what you do, boy," said Tony with an argumentative gesture.

"I have said nothing without forethought."

"You can't fight all Deadset. You may have the will which he had written before he died, but you must know that the map which shows the lines of Deadset—"

"Was destroyed, eh?" put in the youth.

"Exactly. Colonel Quartz lost his mind after quitting Deadset."

"He went through with enough to craze a dozen men. I know all about his life after quitting Deadset. I know what befel him in the Alkali Desert. I am not here ignorant of many chapters from that man's career. I am his heir. I am his sole heir."

He emphasized his last three words so that Tony could not misunderstand, and the big man bit his lips underneath his beard.

"All right," jerked the messenger. "I have your answer. I guess I understand it. Boy, you won't get what you seek. The Dogs of Darkness don't propose to be robbed of a single bone!"

With this Tucson Tony whirled and walked toward the door followed by the eyes of the boy heir.

Dangerous Dot, too, followed him with her piercing orbs.

"The dog is like his master," she exclaimed, at which the man looked darkly over his shoulder, and saying: "You, too, madame," vanished from the hotel.

In another moment Dangerous Dot was at the boy's side.

"Do you know what you have undertaken?" she cried. "Do you know that you are fighting the Dogs of Darkness?"

"If I had any doubts before, I have none now," was the quiet rejoinder. "I promised Colonel Quartz on his deathbed to defend my legacy, and I shall do it, even if it be against the whole kennel. I am in Deadset to take that which is mine!"

"And you will find me with you."

"You?"

"I am Dangerous Dot. I hate the Dogs of Darkness. I have bearded the chief one in his kennel before this, and I will help you maintain your rights in Deadset. You have the will?"

"I have the will."

"Thank fortune for that! I have a card which at the right time I will play against this cabal of darkness. But it is to be a fight to the bitter end—a royal battle for more than a fortune—for life itself. I am with you, boy."

CHAPTER VII.

ORDERS.

Captain Grip, of Deadset, received the Denver boy's reply with closed lips and silent mein.

When Tucson Tony came back with it the man of many crimes heard him through and then leaned back in his chair.

"So he fights, eh?" said he.

"It looks that way."

"And the woman joined you on the street and went with you to the hotel?"

"Yes. I could not shake her very well, and so I concluded to let her accompany me."

"And she remained with the boy?"

"She did."

Against the wall stood the silent Indian, Shooting Sam.

He heard all, but did not speak.

His immobile face that betrayed nothing seemed to harden underneath the conversation, and when Captain Grip looked at him he seemed to let a faint smile wreath his lips.

"What do you say, Sam?" asked the gold-bug.

Tony turned to the Indian and waited for his reply as if he regarded it of great importance.

"Boy cool. He will stand his ground."

"It looks that way, Sam."

"Dangerous Dot will stand by boy."

"What if she does?" snarled the Captain. "We can beat this woman and win hands down."

The Indian looked just a little puzzled.

He did not seem so sure of this.

"We will play the first card to-night," continued Captain Grip. "We will let

them have a breathing spell, but at the same time I don't like to have Deadset think that I am going to back down before this youngster."

Tony turned to go, but the voice of his master held him at the door.

"You will watch the boy," said Captain Grip. "See that he does nothing much during the day. He will not try to do much, I think; he may look over the mines. Let him do that if he will. He may give out among the men of Deadset that he owns one-half the town by the alleged will of the late Colonel Quartz, who died in Denver."

"Must I try to counteract such talk?"

"No. Give him all the rope he wants," smiled Captain Grip. "Let him go the full length of his tether. We will tighten on him in the near future."

Tony bowed.

"You, Sam, you will take care of the precious pair."

"Dot and Mina?"

"Yes."

It was evident that the Indian did not relish his commission very much, but there was nothing to do but to accept it. He did so with a slight inclination of his head and crossed the room.

"You're not afraid of them, eh, Sam?"

Shooting Sam stopped and looked at his master with eyes that appeared to emit sparks of fire.

"When did Sam become afraid of women?" said he. "The Captain forgets that he never feared a living soul."

Captain Grip made no reply to this and the Indian was allowed to depart.

"What's this accusation the girl makes against Sam?" he asked, turning to Tony waiting still at the door.

"What is it?"

"She says he once killed a woman."

"Did she say it to his face?"

"She did."

"And Sam?"

"He made no reply, but his eyes flashed."

"You never heard of it, then?"

"I never did. Come, sit down and tell me, for you know."

Tucson Tony drew a chair up to the table and threw his broad-brimmed hat upon it.

"It was some years ago, and I was in the canyon country south of here. There was a white woman there who was a singular creature, half-witted as we thought, but with the coolness of a man, and an excellent shot with the rifle.

"She had accumulated a good deal of wealth, as wealth goes in that part of the world, but she gave some of the boys a good deal of trouble.

"They called her Maverick Mary, and she had marked her cattle with a peculiar brand which made them known all over the region. She had the best and the biggest herds, but all at once they became diseased and died off by hundreds.

"Maverick Mary said nothing, but went to work with the cleverness of a detective to discover who was poisoning her cattle, for all felt that it was the work of poison.

"It will never be known what she found out, but one night when she had lost nearly all her herds she was found dead in the big pass on her ranch."

"Found dead?" echoed Captain Grip.

"Yes; shot through the breast, and dead beside her white horse."

"Who killed her?"

"It is generally believed that Shooting Sam did."

"That Indian?"

"Yes. He was said to have been in that part of the country at the time, and it was known that once or twice he had stopped at the ranch. Mary believed that he was the poisoner, which crime he committed to avenge a fancied slight of some kind. But

the murder was never clearly traced to Sam."

"What do you think about it?"

"I think what the people thought at the time."

"That he killed the ranch-woman?"

"Yes."

"But what proofs would little Mina be likely to have?"

"None what she did not get from Dangerous Dot."

Captain Grip started suddenly, and his hand, which was resting on the edge of the table, fell off abruptly.

"Here is where she comes into the game, is it?" he exclaimed. "So Dot thinks that Sam killed Maverick Mary."

"She believes it anyhow."

"There is where Mina got her information, but that is not proof. What does Sam say?"

"He is silent. If he killed the woman the secret is wrapped up in his heart, and you can bet your last ounce of dust that it will remain there."

"Dangerous Dot hates me with a hatred that seems born in the lower world."

"You employ the Indian whom she hates."

"Oh, that accounts for her hate? Well, she and Sam can fight it out, but she must not interfere with my game."

"She has already taken the boy's part."

"That brings her into the game, don't you see, Tony?"

The dark-faced listener nodded.

"Don't forget your duty to-day," admonished Captain Grip, as his man rose to go. "Keep a sharp lookout upon the boy's movements, and report to me."

Captain Grip was alone.

The footsteps of his man had died away beyond the door and he went to the window and looked down the street to the sunlit plaza.

This man was a real nabob, so far as certain things went. He was a slick desperado, who had accumulated great wealth, not altogether honestly, and, like Dangerous Dot, there were some chapters in his life which Deadset never read.

With an iron grip he held onto the half of the mountain north of what was known as "the old trail." No one ever knew just how it had fallen into his hands, since it was owned at one time by the founder of Deadset, Colonel Quartz, a strange man who had vanished some years before, and who was thought to have given his property to Captain Grip.

He had come, taken possession with all the coolness of a man accustomed to doing cool things, and with such men as Yellow Merle, Tucson Tony and Shooting Sam, to back him, his reign soon became absolute.

It was against this man and his minions that Lucky Link came to wage.

It was against this band that he had come to Deadset to fight for his rights, which he had received in writing in the last will and testament of this same strange man, Colonel Quartz.

The day waned and the sun dropped down the sky toward the illuminated tips of the mountains.

Tony had carried out the commands of his master with signal ability, or as he was accustomed to doing all things.

He had not lost sight of the Boy from Denver for a moment; he had seen him walk down the roads that led to the mines and back again to the hotel.

Once Tony thought the boy intended to pay Captain Grip a visit, and his heart stood still at the idea of such audacity, but Lucky Link did not ring the bell, which the Captain had brought from Frisco, and instead went to the Black Bear, and shut himself up in his room.

Meantime Red Jack, the other Indian, and White Jack, the mule, had vanished.

"With the Indian out of the way," thought Tony, "it will be easier for the Captain to deal with the boy."

For some time the tough stood before the Black Bear and watched the light in the boy's window.

By and by he walked away, and was near the Captain's house when he became conscious that some one was behind him.

Tony turned and caught sight of a slight, girlish figure in the street, and the next minute he stood face to face with Mina, Dangerous Dot's ward.

She came forward fearlessly, seeing that she was discovered, and Tony waited for her to speak.

"You've been playing spy, Tony of Tucson," accused the girl.

The big brute laughed.

"What if I have?" said he.

"You have watched him all day; you have been his shadow, and have followed him wherever he went. It was the Captain's orders, we know all that; but you seemed to delight in your task."

"What is it to you, Mina? And while you are answering my question, tell me what it is to your friend Dot."

Instantly the little eyes before Tony were seen to scintillate.

"It is a good deal to us, for we are his friends," said she. "And the moment your master, Captain Grip, throws down his first card, he will find a trump on the table."

"Oh," laughed Tony, almost boisterously. "Go home and keep out of the game. It's not one for you, girl."

CHAPTER VIII.

FACE TO FACE.

Night fell about Deadset.

In the little room to which he had been assigned by Spanish Jim, the landlord of the Black Bear, sat the Boy from Denver.

The lamp that illumined the chamber stood on a table at his elbow, and he was looking over a legal-looking document, which he held in his hands.

By and by he rose and placed the paper in the black valise that hung on the wall at the head of his couch, and then, coming back to the table, he resumed the chair and appeared to wait for some one.

All at once footsteps came up the stairs near the door and the following moment the door opened.

The landlord put his hard face inside.

"You're wanted downstairs," said Spanish Jim.

"By whom?"

"You'll see when you get thar."

The face vanished and the heavy boots sounded on the carpetless steps as their owner went back.

The boy went to the valise and took from it a folded document, which he hid in his bosom, then he opened the door and was soon on the stairs.

The moment he opened the door leading into the so-called reception-room of the hotel, he saw what was up.

He stood face to face with the crisis of his life.

The well-filled room, the dark faces and the stalwart figures of men in dark shirts and wearing long beards or fierce mustaches, told him that he was looking at the mob of Deadset, the men who were under Captain Grip's thumb.

The boy heir stopped at the door and waited for some one to speak.

In front of the crowd, trying to hide his rage, stood Captain Grip himself, attired in a new suit of clothes, which stamped him the nabob of the place, and he was looking at the "young usurper" with eagle eyes.

Near by stood Yellow Merle and Tucson Tony, but Shooting Sam, the redskin, was notably absent.

The silence that followed the boy's entrance was deep and painful.

All eyes were turned upon Captain Grip. "So you're the youngster who wants to rob us?" said the master desperado of the mountain town.

"I am Link Lucky, and I am here on business connected with some property recently left me by the will of the late Colonel Quartz, of Denver."

The Boy from Denver was cool and collected. He did not speak hastily nor with any show of resentment, but his voice was soft but full, and his countenance as mild as a summer's day.

"They tell me," began Captain Grip, "they say that you have brought to Deadset the so-called will of the madman, who believed insanely that the world belonged to him, and that he had a right to give it away as he pleased."

"I deal in no false documents," answered Link. "I am here armed with genuine papers."

"Oh, you have the will, then?"

Captain Grip sent a swift glance toward Merle and Tony, as if to say: "After all you didn't get the documents when you searched the boy in the mountains;" but he did not speak to his men.

"You will produce what you have," continued the gold-bug of Deadset, with a wave of the hand. "I don't believe that you have anything of the kind, but if you have, in the presence of the inhabitants of Deadset, you will produce it, or forever after keep it under cover."

"When the time comes the document will be produced."

"You refuse, then?"

"When the time comes it will be produced."

Captain Grip burst into a laugh, which was echoed by the men by whom he was flanked or half-surrounded.

"You see through the whole scheme, gentlemen," he cried, looking at the crowd. "This is the boy who came to Deadset to make us all poorer and to play a hand with a lot of false cards."

The Boy from Denver flushed visibly.

"I am here to say in open meeting that you never had in your possession the will of the late Colonel Quartz," exclaimed the man of Deadset. "I am here to call you an impostor, whose absence from Deadset will prove of more benefit to you than your presence here."

The finger of Captain Grip covered the boy, whose back touched the counter.

He had drawn his really handsome figure to its true height, and never before did Captain Grip look so much the iron-handed ruler as then.

"The will or exile, and that right off!" he thundered. "We will not put up with a game of this kind. We stand by our rights, and without a will—a genuine one, remember—you cannot remain another hour in town."

The boy did not move nor answer.

He looked down the line of dark beards, and then came back and fixed his gaze upon Captain Grip.

"We are north of the old trail," said he, quietly.

"Nonsense," cried the Captain. "I know what you claim. I know what this madman claimed—that all north of the old trail belonged to him."

"Did it not? Wasn't the ground north of the line his? What gave it to you?"

The Captain's lips curled proudly, but he did not reply.

"Where is the old map, Captain Grip?"

"Where you can never touch it."

"That map establishes Colonel Quartz's claim to the property mentioned in his will."

"We recognize no map in Deadset. We have owned the ground where we stand for years, and no living being shall dispossess us."

"But you acknowledge that Colonel Quartz once owned some land here?"

"He may have done so. But the man was mad—as mad as a March hare."

"Who made him mad?"

The Boy from Denver had stepped from the counter and now stood free of it and within a few feet of Captain Grip.

"I ask you who made that man mad? Who had him followed like a hunted wolf from pillar to post; who made life a ceaseless round of misery for him, and who left him to die in Satan's Canyon? Let your thoughts run back a few years, Captain Gordon Grip. Go back a few chapters in your own life. You won't have to go very far."

The man addressed looked at the young speaker and his face seemed to turn white.

"That has nothing to do with the question at issue," he said at last.

"It has a good deal to do with it."

"Nonsense! I will give you three minutes," and Captain Grip took out his watch and let it rest in the dark palm of his left hand.

"I will give you three minutes to do one of two things—produce the document called by you 'the last will and testament of the late Colonel Quartz,' or walk from my hotel never again to cross its threshold, but to continue your journey beyond the confines of Deadset, of Colorado."

The eyes of the gold-bug dropped to the dial of the watch and rested there as he seemed to count off the seconds.

"Open a path to the door for the boy," said the voice of Yellow Merle, and the crowd down that way separated and Lucky Link could look out upon the porch.

Yes, he could look in that direction, could even see the lights shining upon the plaza; but he did not move in that direction.

Captain Grip did not look up any more. He was silently timing the boy heir, and would not lift his face until the last second had been ticked off.

Spanish Jim, leaning over the counter with a diabolical grin upon his face, was eager to get rid of his obnoxious boarder, and was also counting the seconds when he would see him walk from the hotel never again to return.

"Ten seconds," muttered the lips of Captain Grip, without looking up.

They were soon ticked off, and the bronzed face of the Czar of Deadset was lifted at last.

"Time's up!" said he, coolly. "You will walk from the hotel out into the night and will proceed on and on until you have placed Deadset behind you."

Then was made the first real movement. Lucky Link had executed since entering the room.

His right hand moved rapidly to his breast and vanished there.

It came into view a moment later and the document which it clutched seemed to take Captain Grip's breath.

It was folded and had a legal look; it was wrapped with red tape and a red seal was seen in one corner as it fluttered open in the boy's hand.

"This is the will of Colonel Quartz, of Denver; this is the will which makes me his sole heir, and transfers to me his mines and other property in Deadset!"

Silence fell over the breathless crowd.

Link, looking at Captain Grip, paused and seemed to wonder what the man would say.

"It is a forgery!" thundered the nabob, with a quick start. "What right have we to accept a document so carried to Deadset?"

"There is one man in the world who knows the signature of Colonel Quartz. There is one man who will not dispute that signature, for he has seen it written under circumstances which he will never forget."

The Boy from Denver opened the document still further and the paper was flashed in Captain Grip's face.

"Look at the signature of Colonel Quartz," cried he. "Look at it critically, Captain Grip. You have seen it before. You are the one man in the world who saw it written under circumstances which I will not recall."

In spite of himself the desperado in broadcloth leaned forward and looked at the name which had been traced in large, rough characters at the foot of the will.

His eyes seemed to start from his head, but the next moment they receded.

"What say you, Captain Grip?"

The white face of the man addressed was proof of the genuineness of the signature, but there was to be no surrender by the iron hand.

"The door to safety lies over the mountain and leads back to Denver, or as far from Deadset as your limbs will take you," he suddenly cried. "Will or no will, boy, Captain Grip and pard stand their ground and will not be plundered!"

CHAPTER IX.

A CYCLONE IN SCARLET.

In another part of Deadset at this very moment is being played another act with which we have to deal.

It will be remembered that Captain Grip commissioned Shooting Sam, the Indian, to look after Dangerous Dot and Mina, her pretty ward, and that the Indian seemed not to like his work.

The bold accusation thrown into Shooting Sam's teeth by Mina at Captain Grip's abode staggered that worthy and caused him to give the fearless girl a sharp, vengeful glance in reply.

Shooting Sam carried out his last commission to the letter, so that when night came he had watched the two females with the persistency of a hawk.

About the hour of the startling confrontation at the hotel Dot was alone in her little shanty and her figure was revealed by the lamp that burned on the table.

Leaning against another shanty across the street stood a lithe little figure. It had remained motionless for near an hour, and a pair of keen eyes were regarding the woman's home.

This was Shooting Sam.

The redskin now and then looked up or down the street that straggled in a wavering line past the shanty, but he did not quit his post.

At last he crossed the street and trod softly to the door of the shanty.

All the cunning of his people shone in Sam's eyes, and though clad in civilized garments, he had lost none of his savagery when it came to tricks or low cunning.

By glancing in at the little window alongside the door he could see Dangerous Dot in the chamber, and at length, as if a certain time had come, he opened the portal.

A slight squeak roused the woman, and she looked up to see in the place the nabob's right bower.

Shooting Sam stopped and looked straight at her.

He did not apologize for his entrance—he never apologized to any one—as if he was above such things—but came forward glidingly like a thug.

Dot rose and stood erect, her body slightly thrown back and her hands clenched.

It was evident to her that the Indian had come on a wicked mission and from his master.

The pair stood face to face a moment, and the savage seemed to smile as he faced Dot.

"You send your girl out to throw things into Shooting Sam's teeth."

"Do you mean Mina?"

"I mean the little sparrow whom you feed," was the reply. "I speak of her."

"Oh! She's been insulting you, has she?"

The Indian growled out an incoherent answer.

"What did the child say?"

Sam took a step forward and dropped his hissing voice almost to a whisper.

"You know, for you put it into her mouth!"

Dangerous Dot remained calm.

"I told Mina nothing that was to be thrown into your teeth. I never send her out upon such errands. If she said anything to you it must have been after you had addressed her."

"It was at the Captain's house, and she had carried your message thither."

"But you have not told me what she said."

Sam seemed to bite his lips. It was evident that the man had entered the shanty for a quarrel with the woman, and was not to be diverted from his purpose.

"Why ask Sam?" he cried. "The little sparrow would not think of what she said but for you."

Dangerous Dot saw through his scheme; she saw that his sullenness had a purpose which was calculated to arouse her and to invite an assault.

Why avoid it? Why not have it out with this red spy who had been dogging her footsteps all day?

"You need not blame the child Mina," said Dot. "You can place the blame wherever your suspicion pleases you to do."

"I thought so!"

He threw out his right hand, and the next moment it had closed upon the woman's arm.

Like a vise it closed there, and Dot, falling back the length of the redskin's arm, looked into his flashing eyes and felt his hot breath upon her cheeks.

"You told her to throw into Sam's teeth the old story about the ranch queen found dead by her white horse."

"You mean Maverick Mary?"

A slight nod indicated that the Indian heard, but his answer was a fierce grunt.

"You have hissed this charge forth once too often," he went on. "You have taught the little one to repeat it and to throw it into Sam's teeth in the Captain's presence."

"And, pray, what did your master say about it?"

Dot was the aggressor now, and her nerves were like steel, and she was looking into the red's face with the coolness of a male desperado.

"Never mind. You don't like me."

"Have I ever said I did not?"

"No, but I know you do not. You have taught the girl to humiliate me in the eyes of my friend the Captain and—"

"You didn't kill Maverick Mary, then?"

The question went to its target like an unerring arrow.

Shooting Sam seemed to stagger from the blow, and for a moment he seemed on the eve of tearing Dot piecemeal.

But she did not quiver.

She knew that this man outmatched her in strength, that he was her master in more ways than one, and that she was alone with him, Mina having gone out since dark to see what was to be Captain Grip's next move against the Boy from Denver.

Suddenly the Indian began to push Dot back. Inch by inch he forced her toward the wall of the shanty, and at last her back touched it, with the dark, menacing face of the infuriated Indian almost touching hers.

"You think Sam killed her, eh?"

"I know it."

Dot was desperate. She looked into the flashing eyes of her enemy, yet told him that she believed him to be a murderer.

"You know it, do you?" he grinned. "You know that it was Sam's bullet that left Maverick Mary dead beside her white horse? What has sealed your lips so long?"

"I was not compelled to speak. I can keep a secret as long as you can."

"You didn't see it?"

"I didn't have to see it to know who killed the ranch lady."

"How's that?"

This time no answer parted the woman's lips. She merely continued to look at Sam and to note how eager he was to worm the full secret from her.

"Maverick Mary insulted Sam," said the Indian. "She once struck him across the face with a bull-hide whip."

"Oh, was that the motive for the crime?"

"It was a blow that made Sam's blood boil in his veins. It sent it hot all through his body, and he swore vengeance against the ranch woman of the Southwest."

"A life for a lash, was that it? First, you killed her cattle."

"They drank at a certain place and—died."

"Villain!" cried Dangerous Dot. "I never heard of two crimes more dastardly."

The redskin winced. To have such an epithet hurled into his teeth was exasperating; but to have it put there by a woman was pouring brine upon an open wound.

He threw her back against the wall, and one hand slipped suddenly to her throat.

"You must swear that you will never again throw it into my teeth, that the child shall no more talk it at me, and that before the end of three days both of you will be beyond the range with your backs turned forever upon Deadset."

"You are asking a great deal."

"You must go—you and the sparrowhawk."

"This is our home. I own the ground this little cabin occupies, and the iron hand of Captain Grip has no right to disturb the title."

"You must go."

"We will not!"

Sam's hand tightened spasmodically at the woman's throat, and his eyes seemed to get a wilder look.

"It is life to go; it is death to remain."

"We will not go."

In another moment the hands of the Indian had jerked her away from the wall, and he was holding her at arm's length in the middle of the room.

"You say you know that Sam killed the ranch woman. How do you know?"

Dot saw the almost devouring curiosity that had taken possession of the Indian's nature. He was burning to know how she knew.

"Why tell you when you know who killed Maverick Mary? Let that secret die with me."

"You must tell Sam. You must tell him how you found it out."

"Then know, but not from fear," was the retort. "I came upon my sister's body while life remained in it."

"Your sister?"

A grim smile seemed to settle over the woman's face and she took a long breath.

"The secret kept through long years is out at last. Maverick Mary was my sister."

Sam dropped his prey and seemed to totter toward the door.

"I have told the truth, and I said at the time, kneeling over the almost breathless body of my poor sister, that the time would come when I would pay the murderer back, and when I would play a hand of destruction against all with whom he might ally himself."

Sam saw the hand that darted toward

the table, covered with a dark thick cloth partially raised at one corner.

He knew what was there.

As the hand touched the table he darted forward with the suddenness of a panther, and as Dot flashed out the revolver he caught her and threw her against the wall.

She dropped there like one dead, killed in an instant, and the following moment he was at the door.

But the moment he opened it he was confronted by a girlish figure in the moonlight, and at the report of Mina's revolver he threw up his hands to fall face downward in the dust of the street.

CHAPTER X.

THE PLUNDERED HIDING PLACE.

It was the report of Mina's revolver that broke the thrilling tableau at the hotel.

The Boy from Denver, confronted by Captain Grip and his friends, stood against the counter and listened to the words that were spoken by the Czar of Deadset.

The Captain had just said that they would not be cheated out of their rights by a boy, and the last words had barely sounded when Shooting Sam fell headlong to the earth before the revolver of the cool girl of Deadset.

Some one on the porch called out that a man had been shot, and with an instinct that seemed to tell him who the victim was, Captain Grip bounded from the room and stopped in the street outside.

For a moment Link and his crusade were forgotten, but all at once the crowd came back to him, but the boy was gone.

No one seemed to know whither he had vanished, but he was not to be seen, and for half a moment the fiends of Deadset looked perplexed.

The body of Sam, the Indian, was lifted from the dust and carried away.

Life still remained in the Indian's breast and his eyes seemed to wander round the rough crowd that pressed toward him with mute inquiry and eager faces.

In Dangerous Dot's little home stood Mina and the strange woman side by side.

Dot had recovered from the severe choking she had received at Sam's hands, and together the two waited for the onslaught of the enraged men of the mountain town.

They had been left entirely alone for the time, but they felt that it would not long be thus.

By and by the door opened and the face of Lucky Link appeared.

Dot started the moment she caught sight of it.

"You must not enter here," cried she. "They will find you when they come back for blood and vengeance and—"

"Let him stay," put in Mina. "We may need help and I have seen him tried before those very men to-night."

The Boy from Denver was already inside and was standing coolly in the light, looking first at Dot and then at Mina.

"Did they wrest the will from you?" asked Dot.

"They did not. I held it up before Captain Grip and he knew the signature. I knew he could not go back on it, for he had seen it before, though not at the bottom of a will."

"Hark!" cried the girl, springing to the door, where she stopped and turned with her fingers upon her lips.

"Are they coming, Mina?"

"I hear men, and they seem to be coming this way. Stand back, over against the wall behind the door," she addressed the boy cool-head. "They will not see you then."

Instinctively the boy obeyed and all

waited for the coming of the wolves of revenge.

Seconds seemed minutes to the three in the cabin, and at last footsteps were heard to halt in front of it.

"They are here," whispered Mina.

Sure enough, in the moonlight outside stood ten men whose stalwart, giant-like forms were distinctly visible from the window, and as Mina and Dangerous Dot looked at them they seemed to feel that the knell of doom was about to be struck.

A short silence followed the halting of the band before the door.

Presently one stepped forward and his bare knuckles struck the heavy plank like a hammer.

It was a summons which could not be passed over in silence.

Mina threw up her hand to the barricade which she had placed in position after Link's coming, but the fingers of Dot reached it first.

"Let me face them, child," she said, while her eyes flashed. "I will see them."

In another instant the barricade fell and the door was pulled ajar.

There they stood, the ten men, their bronzed faces showing dark in the moonlight and their long locks falling over their shoulders.

"We want the girl," said one.

Dot said nothing for a moment, measuring them all from head to foot, as if calculating their strength and prowess.

"You want my girl, do you?"

"We want the little badger who killed Sam."

"But Sam wasn't dead when you carried him off."

"But he's dead now, as dead as the little shootist ought to be."

"Oh!" exclaimed Dot. "You want blood for blood, do you?"

"Isn't that mountain law?"

"It's a certain kind of law, but you don't know why the child dropped him."

"We don't keer to know," was the quick response. "We'll pull her up first and—"

"And find out afterward?"

"That's it. Hand her over."

Back of Dangerous Dot stood the girl, her face pale, but her nerves under complete control.

Dot's body filled the door as it stood open, and she did not retreat when Blacklock Phil, the speaker for the mob, came forward as if about to push his way into the shanty.

"You can't have Mina."

The words were firmly spoken and they all heard.

"You don't expect to keep us back, eh, Dot?"

"You can't have the child."

For a moment the crowd seemed to fall back, but the next instant it was at the door.

Dangerous Dot shut it in their faces and put up the barricade before the foremost could lift a hand to prevent.

"Stand back!" cried the voice of Blacklock Phil to his men. "I know how to get inside. Stand by me, you fellows, and I will show you the old Deadwood trick."

Phil had the figure and the muscle of a giant, and standing in the moonlight, with his sleeves rolled almost to his shoulders, he looked like a pugilist.

This giant was about to launch himself against the door when a voice down the street was heard and he looked that way.

"Call off your boys," it said. "Shooting Sam isn't dead and we will hold court tomorrow."

"Not dead?" passed from lip to lip.

Phil took a long breath, but still looked eagerly at the door as if reluctant to let it alone, but he recognized the voice and desisted.

They fell back, those dark-faced ruffians, and the inmates of the shanty breathed free again.

"The storm has not subsided," said Dot, looking at the Denver boy as he stepped from the wall.

"It has just begun."

"You are right. I told you at the hotel that I would stand by you and I shall stand there to the last. Captain Grip says that the will is worth nothing without the old map which showed the land owned by Colonel Quartz."

"He boasts of this."

"I have that map."

"You?"

"I have it safe and sound."

"I thought it—"

"That it was burned? Many think so, and among them Captain Grip himself."

"That is why he boasts that it is safe."

"Just so. It was the intention of the fiends to totally destroy the old map, and for this purpose the cabin where it was hidden was set on fire."

"And burned down," put in Mina.

Dangerous Dot smiled.

"Burned to the ground," she went on. "But the map wasn't in the shanty at the time. It had been carried away and is now safe where I can lay hands upon it at short notice."

"This strengthens my cause," said the boy. "The possession of the old plat of Deadset will make strong the cause I espouse. These men shall not cheat me out of my rights."

"But they will dispute every foot of ground. Captain Grip knows that, with the will and the map in your hands, his cause is lost and the Dogs of Darkness will have to seek another kennel."

A short silence followed Dot's last words, which she broke herself by saying to Mina:

"Go to the door and listen, while you watch from the window."

Mina obeyed and the boy crossed the little room, taking up the station assigned by Dot.

"Now," continued the woman, "now I will show you the map which I carried from the shanty just before it was burned. It was worth my life to take it, but I determined that Captain Grip should not destroy the evidence which could break his hold on Deadset provided Colonel Quartz ever recovered his reason and made a will or came thither to reclaim his own."

The Boy from Denver, who had followed with his eyes the speaker, saw her stoop at the head of her couch and lift one of the boards that formed the floor in that locality.

He held his breath as she ran her hand beneath the plank, but the next moment it was withdrawn and Dot turned to him with a pale face.

"It has been stolen from me," she gasped.

Mina uttered a cry, and the boy sprang over to where the white-faced woman was.

"When did you see it last?" asked the girl.

"It was there yesterday."

"You are sure of it?"

"I am. I took it out and looked at it."

Mina went over to the lifted plank and ran her own slender hand beneath it.

It touched nothing.

"Truly it is gone," she exclaimed. "You must have been watched, Madame Dot."

"Watched by whom?" was the quick response. "I looked all around before taking the map out from under the board. I was very careful. I would have staked my head that no eye saw me."

"But you see that it is gone."

Dot seemed to grate her white teeth.

"Gone it is and it is not hard to tell into whose hands it has fallen. Captain

Grip is playing his last bold hand in Deadset, and he realizes that if he is beaten here he can never hold another winning card."

"Map or no map, that villain is to be beaten," said Lucky Link, with resolution, and Mina, with flashing eyes, applauded.

CHAPTER XI.

A NEW CHAMPION.

It was true that Shooting Sam, the Indian, was not dead.

Although shot by the girl Mina, he was in a fair way to get out in a few hours, and he lay upon a couch in Captain Grip's best room with a tensely drawn face and his head bandaged.

Sam was alone.

It was an hour after the shooting and the streets of Deadset were almost deserted.

Blacklock Phil and his friends had been called back from Dot's shanty and the hotel was the scene of some excitement.

There the men of Deadset were discussing the events of the past two days and there was a difference of opinion.

At one end of the counter stood a man who was known as the Ajax of Deadset.

He was a veritable Hercules in stature, as well as in strength, and Big Bronson, or Burly Burt, as he was best known, was talking.

This man had just arrived from the world beyond the limits of Deadset, and had listened to the recital of late events by Yellow Merle, who had put Captain Grip's best side forward.

"That's just how it was," said Merle, stepping back as he finished, with his eyes fixed upon Burly Burt, whose stalwart frame leaned against the counter in an offhand way.

All eyes were turned to the new-comer, and the men of Deadset were wondering what he was about to say.

"Seems to me it's cold deck agin the boy."

"Not at all," put in Merle. "You see what he wants to do—run us all out o' Deadset."

"It wouldn't be running any one out if the land belongs to him."

"But it don't."

"Didn't he fetch the will along?"

"He brung a dockment what says that he had been left such and such property north o' such and such a line."

"Well? Didn't that property once belong to Colonel Quartz?"

"It was said to."

Yellow Merle was trying to avoid the issue.

"Didn't it?" said Burly Burt, stepping from the counter. "I ask all of you men. What did the old map say—the one what is lost? Didn't it say what belonged to the madman, and didn't it mark out the boundary lines?"

"Thar war certain lines on the little map—that's a fact; but you see that Captain Grip bought the land of him."

"Whar's the Captain's deed?"

Trouble was brewing and Bronson was the maker of it.

"If the Captain can show a good deed for the land it is his and all the wills in existence can't get it from him. That's all there is of that. Where is the Captain's deeds? I never saw 'em."

Underneath his heavy mustache Yellow Merle stammered.

"I am no one's champion," continued Bronson. "I am in favor of justice; I don't care who it hurts. If the Boy from Denver has the will and the Captain has no deeds for the land he occupies, why, what are we to do but to let the youngster have his rights?"

There were nods to this declaration, for

there were men in Deadset who were in favor of fair play, and it needed but a champion courageous enough to take sides.

"You see, the Captain don't want no interlopers," said Merle, picking up some courage at sight of Tony's figure in the doorway. "We stand by him, of course, but at the same time we want justice done."

"If Captain Grip is the legatee, eh?"

"No, if he is in the right."

"Well, we'll look into this matter a little. I own a lot of mining stock in this region. My little lode is north of the old trail, and therefore must be claimed by this boy."

"Of course he claims it," broke in Tucson Tony. "That's what he's here for."

"I have no deed for what I own," answered Bronson, with a sweep of his hand. "I am willing to give up all I own if the boy can show a better right to it. If he was left so much property by Colonel Quartz he should have a show for it."

"But he wasn't."

"That's easy said."

Bronson had turned full upon Tony and the two men stood face to face.

"The will isn't worth that without the map," and Tony snapped his dark fingers in the light.

"Why not?"

"It says one thing and the map another."

"Ha, is that true?"

"It is."

"When did you compare the map and the will?"

Tony started. He felt that all eyes were fastened upon him, and he looked from one man to the other much perplexed and chagrined.

"I didn't know the map was to be found," Bronson went on, speaking coolly; "I have always understood that the old plat was burned up in the red shanty some months ago. But you seem to speak positively about the will not agreeing with the plat. How can you do so?"

"I meant to say that I didn't think they agreed."

"But you didn't say that—not at all."

Tony slid down the room toward the door and stopped there, his face red and his eyes flashing.

For some time there had been no good feeling between him and Burly Bronson, and the whole camp knew it.

The crowd drew back instinctively, as if it expected a collision between the two men.

"Produce the map and lay the will beside it," said Bronson. "That will prove it."

"You want to make out that the map wasn't burned."

"Never mind. You talked as if you had seen it since the will was brought to camp."

Tony's hand went toward his hip, but all at once he was looking into the muzzle of a cocked six-shooter, which was held uncomfortably close to his face.

"I'm not here for a fight. I'm no one's champion, understand that; but the Denver boy—I haven't seen him, remember—the boy, I say, shan't be deprived of his rights if they belong to him. And as for Captain Grip, always on the make, whether he makes it honestly or not, he shall not rule with a rod of iron if he and not the boy is the usurper."

These words seemed to sound like drops of water falling upon red hot iron, and the big figure of Bronson stood in the lamplight with the proportions of a giant, his face as calm as ever, and the revolver as steady as the hand that held it.

Tony saw that he was working at a dis-

advantage, and Yellow Merle fully expected to see his friend reel through the door with a bullet in his brain.

Bronson's declaration that he was no one's champion looked strange to the crowd in the light of his actions. He had defended the Boy from Denver against the words of the two toughs and friends of Captain Grip, yet he had declared that he was not taking sides in the matter.

Tony wanted to get away from the hotel.

He was anxious to tell Captain Grip that a troublesome man had come back, but he could not do so honorably with the revolver looking him in the face.

Suddenly the hand of Merle fell upon Burly Bronson's arm.

"No need o' all this," cried the rough. "We are friends and comrades; our interests are the same in Deadset, and we can't afford to eat one another like wolves over a little matter like this."

The arm dropped and Tony took occasion to slide from the place, and in another moment was out upon the porch waiting for Merle, whose boots he heard on the floor.

"Now for the Captain," said Tony, when his friend appeared. "Who would have expected all that from Bronson?"

"The man's mad; he never liked you anyhow, and he wanted to have something to say."

The two men tore down the street and presently reached Captain Grip's door, which they burst open without ceremony.

They startled the Captain, coming from the room where Shooting Sam was tossing upon the bloody couch, and the moment he saw them he stopped.

"What's up?"

"Bronson's come back and has taken sides with the kid."

Instantly the face of the Goldbug of Deadset lost color and he seemed to reel.

"Back, is he? I thought he went to Carson City?"

"There's no telling where he's been. It may have been a blind, but he's up at the hotel and he talks from the shoulder with all the coolness of a thug."

Captain Grip looked toward the door which he had just closed and that moment it opened and Sam stepped into the hall.

"If Burly Bronson has taken sides with white boy he has a cool champion," said the Indian.

"But one whom we must meet and fight."

"You will find Bronson cool and clever, Cap'n Grip."

"I know that, but the man himself owns land north of the old trail and that will keep him aloof from the boy."

"No; he expressed himself as willing to give it up if the map and the will agreed."

"He did? Bronson may stand in with the boy. They may have made a bargain before the youngster came to Deadset."

"I never thought of that," cried Yellow Merle. "They could have done that."

Shooting Sam, who had been standing against the wall with arms folded, seemed to lean toward the group and another moment his voice startled them all.

"We can't win so long as Dangerous Dot has the map which was not burned in the shanty."

Captain Grip laughed.

"Then we will win," cried he. "Dangerous Dot doesn't hold the plat of Deadset."

"But she took it from the shanty the night it burned."

"That may be, but she has lost it."

"Then you—"

Captain Grip's hand flew to his bosom

and vanished there underneath his shirt; but the next moment it reappeared and a dark little thing made of parchment was held on high with an air of triumph.

"Now, Sam, what say you? Can the boy beat us out of Deadset and its treasures?"

The Indian's eyes seemed to start from his head while he looked at what he knew to be the priceless map of old Deadset, and for a moment he was silent.

"You have the map? Good," he cried. "Now, if you want to keep what you claim turn it into ashes at once."

Captain Grip laughed with the ardor of a fiend.

CHAPTER XII.

BURLY BURT AND LUCKY LINK.

The Boy from Denver felt that the shooting of Shooting Sam was to be followed by dire events.

He knew the link that united the Indian and his master, and he waited quietly after his visit to Dangerous Dot's home for the next chapter in the story.

Slowly the day waned.

He knew that Burly Bronson had come back, for one of the men of Deadset pointed the giant out to him and told him of the altercation at the hotel.

Another night had fairly settled down over Deadset when Lucky Link found himself face to face with his new champion.

Burly Bronson looked down at the boy and sized him with a half grin upon his somber countenance.

"So you're the boy what wants to rob all of us of our rights?" he began.

"I am Link Lucky, but as to robbing any one of his vested rights, I have no desire to do that."

"Then they've lied on you wonderfully," grinned the giant. "I was told when I came back that you were about to dispossess us and drive us pell mell into the hills, there to starve like a lot of hunted wolves."

"I am here as the legatee of the late Colonel Quartz, whom you may have known."

"I knew the man. He went mad after leaving here and I used to hear that he died somewhere among the Rockies."

"It was a miracle that he did not. But he lived to reach Denver, where he recovered his reason and where I happened to be of service to him and thus became his heir."

"It looks pretty straight."

"I believe it is straight," said the boy, reassured by the giant's soft voice. "I did not expect much trouble when I came here, but they stopped me in the mountains and sent me down Death Valley on the White Jack."

"Oh, it was you, then?" cried Bronson.

"You have been told?"

"No, I saw a white mule shoot past my last camp down there, but by the time I was up it was gone. The White Jack is pretty well known in this part of the country and the wonder is that you are here to tell of your ride."

"I would not be but for an Indian called Red Jack, who found me down there and who knawed through the ropes and set me free."

"Where is he?"

"He came to Deadset with me, but has gone away. He was apt to get into trouble here—in fact, did have some words—and thought it best to get away."

"What killed Colonel Quartz?"

"The experiences he had in the mountains."

"They broke him down, eh?"

"Yes."

"Was he wounded?"

"Yes, three times. He was shot that

often while he lay on the ground helpless."

"Who did the shooting? Indians?"

"No, white men; and I am ready to believe that Colonel Quartz knew all about them."

"But he would not tell?"

"No; he died with the secret locked in his bosom and the day after making the will in my favor."

"Let me see the will."

Link produced the document and handed it over to Burly Bronson.

They were seated in the little shanty which the giant occupied when he lived in Deadset and were alone.

He saw Bronson lean forward with the document on his lap, while his hands smoothed out the creases and his eyes seemed to fill with pardonable eagerness.

"If this is genuine it makes a beggar of me," he said, looking up at the boy.

"I don't see how."

"This shanty is north of the line."

The Boy from Denver was silent.

"If this is genuine it makes a good many beggars in Deadset."

"But we can adjust these things."

"The will gives all to you absolute."

"That's true."

"Colonel Quartz didn't tell you to let the boys remain here and occupy the property, eh?"

"He did not, but—"

"They can't stay an hour under the terms of this document. It is all yours and we are beggars."

"But, Mr. Bronson, I am not going to be hard on a single man save one."

"Captain Grip?"

"Yes, the man who shortened Colonel Quartz's life—the person who, more than any other, robbed him of his reason."

"Do you think so?"

"I believe it from little incidents which Colonel Quartz dropped now and then concerning his life."

Burly Bronson turned again to the will and read it through.

He was regarded in silence by the boy heir and their eyes met when the last words of the will had been mastered.

"The Colonel forgot the boundaries of Deadset, I see," said the big man. "He has made several grievous mistakes, and they know it. The map makes all things right, but you haven't got that."

"No; it was stolen from Dangerous Dot, who saved it from the fire of the red shanty."

"Stolen?"

"Yes."

A smile passed over Bronson's face.

"Not long ago I heard a man say that the will and the map didn't jibe."

"You did?"

"Yes, and I see that he was right."

"Was the speaker Captain Grip?"

"No, but he was the Captain's mouth-piece. He said boldly that they didn't jibe at all."

"Colonel Quartz must have forgotten some small things about the map, but in the main he must be correct."

"In the main is not good enough without the map in your hands, don't you see?" answered Burly Bronson. "You must get hold of the parchment plat."

"How can I? The hand that robbed Dangerous Dot will not stop till the map is ashes."

The giant slowly shook his head.

"I'm not so sure about that. The map arms you, don't you see?"

Lucky Link nodded and said that without the map he would have a terrible battle on his hands.

"Terrible does not express it," retorted Bronson of Deadset. "I must say that the map is as important as the will. The map is made upon a certain kind of

parchment which seems to be very old, for you can trace the lines of an older map upon it—"

"You've seen it, then?"

"Oh, yes; we've all seen the old map of Deadset. It is a singular affair, not another in the whole world like it. When are you going back to Denver?"

"When I have carried out the provisions of that will."

Burly Bronson fell back against the wall and seemed to admire the nerve of the boy heir.

Link looked at him coolly and his lips met firmly behind the last word.

Evidently he meant what he said.

"That may mean never."

"I know that. If Captain Grip wins, it will mean never."

The tall form of Bronson rose and towered above the boy; it never looked so adamant before, and Lucky Link could not but admire his breadth of chest and the length of his tremendous arms.

"I like your grit," said Bronson. "You deserve to win and I say it if this shanty does stand north of the line."

"Thank you, sir."

"Never mind such things," with a wave of the hand. "I don't care to hear them. What are you going to do?"

"Make a fight for my rights, of course."

"Without the map?"

"With the will."

"We have no courts here."

"I know that."

"We have a tribunal called the Tribunal of Rend and Tear. It is composed, in part, of the Dogs of Darkness, as we have called Captain Grip and his pards for years. You will have no show before that Tribunal."

"I am aware of that."

"It's high sheriff is the red Indian who lies shot, I am told, in Captain Grip's house."

"Shooting Sam?"

"Its judge is the Captain himself; its underlings Yellow Merle and Tucson Tony. Besides this, the men of Deadset have heretofore been relied on to carry out the sentences of this court."

There was no reply.

"You're in a bad snap," Bronson went on. "I can't help painting it black, for that's all the kind of paint that will do the picture justice."

"It's pretty bad, that's a fact; but my promise, the solemn one made to Colonel Quartz, that after his death I would come to Deadset and make the fight—"

"You made such a promise, did you?"

"I did," through clenched teeth.

"But you did not know what would confront you?"

"He told me all he knew."

"Yet you came?"

"I am here."

"And intend to fight it out?"

"I intend to fight it out."

Burly Bronson came from the wall and his hand dropped upon Link's shoulder.

"It's grit to the backbone. I never saw anything like it agin such odds. Your victory leaves me without a shanty and without land enough for a grave, but—"

That moment was heard the sharp report of a revolver outside, and with the breaking of the pane by a bullet Burly Bronson staggered back and fell heavily against the opposite wall.

The Boy from Denver drew his own revolver as he bounded to the door, but when he opened it no one was in sight.

Had the bullet robbed him of another friend?

CHAPTER XIII. AT THE BLACK BEAR.

The Dogs of Darkness were not oath-bound, nor were they a secret society of any kind.

They were merely a lot of men who had

been thrown together by fate and who had formed a strong friendship in the land of gold.

The nickname was an apt one and had clung to them for years, so that they were called the Dogs of Darkness far and near.

For some time the Denver boy stood in the doorway of Burly Burt's shanty, revolver in hand, looking for the person who had fired the startling shot, but he looked in vain.

The echo of the pistol had died away and the stars that dotted the sky did not show him anything like a human figure.

There were plenty of places for a man to hide among the cabins, and the boy heir could imagine that the would-be slayer had slunk among the shadows and was crouching there obscured from view by the buildings.

By and by he went back to Bronson.

The giant of the camp was not dead and was very far from it at that time.

The bullet had merely stunned him for a time, and when Link reached him he was standing on his feet, trying to pick from the wall with his knife the ball which had almost terminated his career.

"You see what it looks like," said Burt, turning to the boy with a shapeless bit of lead in his hand. "It was searching for me and barely missed the seat of life. You did not see him, of course?"

"I saw no one."

"I would have guessed as much."

"I heard no footsteps, neither."

"Of course not. The rascal got out of the way as soon as possible and you did not get a peep at him. But we will see him. We will stand face to face with the scamp who wanted to cut short the life trail of Burt Bronson."

The big man smiled and looked at the broken glass.

"I'll make him pay for that," he went on. "He must have sneaked close to the shanty and thought he had me foul. Well, never mind, boy. As I was going to say, if you win this fight I am a beggar without so much as a bit of ground to sleep in after I'm done with earth. It's all right. What's yours is yours, and Captain Grip and his minions shall not keep it from you."

The Boy from Denver took hope.

This man was to become his friend and ally. He was to have the assistance of Big Bronson in the fight against the fiends of Deadset, and he felt that he would be armed as a boy had never been in that camp.

Meantime a man who had hurried from shanty to shanty had entered the reception room of the Black Bear and had walked to the counter, where he stopped and faced the men who were there.

It was Tucson Tony.

There was a gleam of vengeance in his eyes and his figure seemed to straighten as he touched the counter.

He ran his eye over the crowd and looked at each man in it without speaking.

"They say that the old map wasn't lost in the fire, Tony," said a little man in high boots who stood over against the wall and who had watched Tony a moment.

"Who says that?"

In an instant the eyes of Tucson Tony were riveted upon the speaker and seemed to look him through.

"It's getting to be the talk in Deadset."

"But who says it? That's what I want to know," and the hand of Tony struck the counter with hearty emphasis. "They say a good deal here, but they never try to prove a single thing."

"They say that some one went to the red shanty and removed the plat before the fire."

"Who did that?"

A moment's silence followed the last word and Tucson Tony seemed to catch his breath.

"I challenge any man to prove that the map wasn't burned that night. I will give him my shares in the Running Nag Mine to produce a particle of proof in that direction."

It was a challenge that drew all to Tony and he was the cynosure of all eyes as he leaned against the counter showing his broad chest to the crowd and his dark face to all who cared to look at it.

"You don't own a share if all I hear is true," tantalizingly remarked the little man, Frisco Fuller.

"What's that?"

"If the boy owns all north of the old trail what can you own?"

A laugh went round the crowd at this sally and Tony lost color.

"But he never owns a foot north of the old line nor elsewhere in Deadset."

"The will don't say that."

"To Tartarus with the will," cried Tony. "Don't you know that it's not worth the paper it's written on?"

"But it was written by Colonel Quartz—"

"The man with wheels in his head? I know that. What can you do with a document of that kind?"

"Carry it out if it corresponds with the map," said some one.

"But there's no map."

Tony spoke in high glee.

Half a minute the doorway was darkened by a man who came in and stood in the light of the hotel lamps.

All turned to him and saw that he was Shooting Sam, the Indian.

A red flannel bound up his head and his eyes seemed to emit sparks of fire.

He had come in quietly and no one was aware of his presence until he presented himself at the door.

Shooting Sam looked like one who had taken a strong resolution of some kind and the crowd was in the throes of expectancy until he spoke.

"Is it the old map you're talking about?" said Sam, looking toward Tony, and thence over his shoulder upon those beyond.

"It was about the old map," said Frisco Fuller.

"It still exists."

Had a thunderbolt fallen at Tony's feet he would not have been more startled.

He looked at Sam as if he did not believe the evidence of hearing, but the Indian was as immobile as ever and his face was stern and stoical.

"I don't know why you say that, Sam," remarked Tony quietly.

"I say it because I know. I have seen it within the last few hours and so have you."

Tony attempted to speak, but stammered.

He wanted to get out; the air was getting too close for him, and he tried to back down along the counter in hopes of reaching the back door.

"Men of Deadset, if you want to hold your own you must do one of two things," continued the Indian. "You must let the boy take all he claims, or you must fight for what you hold in the mines and here in Deadset."

"But he must prove that he has the right to take what he is after."

"He will prove that," spoke Sam. "You are stronger than he, and it is for you to say what you will do. The white boy will turn you all out like a lot of sheep to die on the mountain while he revels in wealth which he never earned. He will run things in Deadset with a high hand and an iron

arm, and he will be the ruler in everything, to the sorrow of the men of the mountain camp, who will become beggars underneath his table."

Tony stopped at the end of the counter and opened his eyes.

The Indian had astonished him again.

He was against the Boy from Denver, and his words were calculated to fire the blood of the men of Deadset.

"Cowards will run or give up their homes at the first shadow that falls over them," Sam went on. "They will beg for mercy and ask the boy to give them a crust when they have had the best of the land. The brave man will stand and resist to the last. He will stand by the mines of Deadset and the little shanties on the mountain. He will not let the boy usurper take from him the homes he has earned."

"Jerusalem!" mentally ejaculated Tony. "This man will have a rope at the boy's throat in ten minutes."

He did not try to seek the door behind him, but came back along the counter, watching the Indian all the time, and waiting for him to go on.

"Down with the boy, then!" cried some one in the crowd. "Let's show him that he can't beggar Deadset with a bit of paper!"

There was a movement—a surging toward the open door which led to the porch, and Tony's eyes glittered.

The fuse was lighted, and the bomb was about to be thrown at Lucky Link's feet.

But all at once the Indian placed his body in front of the mob and lifted his red hand.

The men stopped.

"There is to be another punished who is as bad as the boy," he said. "Deadset has long held a serpent, fair but dangerous. She stands by him now. She stole the map in order to hold it against you, white men, when the time came. She took it from the red shanty to hand it over to the boy when he should come, and she stands by him now."

"Dangerous Dot!" cried a dozen voices.

Shooting Sam's eyes flashed.

"There is but one snake of the sort in Deadset," said he. "She is as dangerous as the rattler of the sand plains; she is death to all peace in Deadset."

"Down with her, too!"

The cry was swelling in the hotel, and in a short time would be heard on the plaza, as it would rise from the throats of fifty enraged men, whose passions had been roused by the man with the red skin.

Shooting Sam seemed to enjoy the work he was doing.

He watched the men before him and felt his bandaged temples throb.

Tucson Tony sprang to his side, and leaned forward.

"Do you know where the boy is?" he asked.

Sam shook his head.

"I know. I know where he was a while ago. He was with Big Bronson. I saw him there."

"Were you there?"

The face of the Indian was turned suddenly to Tony's, and the deep-set eyes seemed to look him through.

"Did you shoot Burly Burt?"

Tony quavered.

In another instant the hands of Shooting Sam fell upon the scoundrel's shoulders and settled there like eagle talons.

"You are the man! You are the man who shot in the dark. Men of Deadset, here is the hound who stole up to Bronson's shanty awhile ago and shot the big pard. He is as dangerous as the white boy or Dangerous Dot, the viper."

CHAPTER XIV.

RED JACK AND WHITE JACK.

Tucson Tony saw that the Indian meant to prejudice the toughs of Deadset against

him and he knew that Burly Burt had many friends among them.

Therefore, when he felt the hands of Sam upon his shoulders and looked into the Indian's eye he feared that the storm would turn and overwhelm him.

But small things turn aside the tempest, and it was so in this case.

The sudden braying of a mule outside caused the men of Deadset to look toward the open door, and in a moment a few had crossed the step and stood on the porch.

"Here's the boy's pard," said some one, and, sure enough, in the square and with the light falling upon him, was to be seen Red Jack seated upon the white mule.

Tony took advantage of the unexpected diversion to slip from the room and in another instant he was on his way to Captain Grip's house.

Red Jack, the observed of all observers, sat on the White Jack and calmly surveyed the crowd gathering around him.

He said nothing while he looked at it, but all at once, seeing a figure coming down the street, he leaped to the ground, and, leading the mule, approached it.

The Boy from Denver and the Indian came together a few yards from the crowd and the red laid his hand upon the boy's arm.

"Red Jack is back—back to fight with you, boy."

"But I may not have to fight."

"You will. Captain Grip is bound to make you get away from Deadset without taking from them a foot of ground, and—"

"Captain Grip cannot have everything his own way," broke in Lucky Link. "This man may find himself balked before he is far along in his scheme."

In another second there was a shout at the other side of the square, and some one said that the Captain himself and his pards were there.

This was true.

Tony had met his master and had turned back with him and Yellow Merle.

The well-dressed figure of Captain Grip was seen in the light, and as he halted in the middle of the plaza he was seen to throw a look at Merle.

"We give the boy till to-morrow to vacate the camp," the Gold-bug of Deadset said, in clear tones. "We give him till daylight to turn his face forever from Deadset, for we tolerate no intermeddlers here."

A dead silence fell upon the scene.

The voice had reached the ears of Lucky Link, who had stopped with Red Jack in the street, and all eyes were turned upon the boy heir.

"You hear me, boy?" Captain Grip asked.

The Boy from Denver nodded.

He did not care to communicate with the Czar of Deadset; he had communicated with him already, and words would only intensify matters on the eve of the final struggle.

"Until daylight, remember!" cried Captain Grip. "There will be no extension of time. There will be an eternal exile after that time if you are here."

No reply.

The figure of Lucky Link was seen to increase a little in the light, and all at once the finger of Captain Grip covered Red Jack.

"I'll include that Indian, too," said he. "I take in that infamous viper in scarlet. I know him. He will go with you into exile, or with you he will take the consequences. Long live the pards of Deadset!"

If the leader of the mountain toughs expected to have his words cheered to the echo, he was disappointed, for a feeble cheer was all they got, and he looked nonplussed.

As suddenly as he had appeared, Captain Grip turned on his heel and walked back

with the two pards, his right and left bow-ers, at his elbows.

"The wolves show their teeth to-night. They will bite to-morrow," spoke Red Jack. "There may be other teeth just as keen," answered the boy.

Lucky Link passed on to the hotel, but, remembering the injunction of Spanish Jim, the landlord, that Indians were not housed at the Black Bear, Red Jack went no further than the porch.

The Boy from Denver leaned toward the red-skin, whom he touched on the shoulder.

"What will you do?" he asked.

"White Jack and Red Jack will remain," was the prompt reply. "They will stand by the white boy to the end."

"You will find a friend in Burly Burt; you will be kindly received by Dangerous Dot and Mina, our friends."

"Red Jack will take care of himself."

Link's hand fell from the naked shoulder, and he looked for the last time across the plaza.

He saw that the crowd had not moved; only to turn and watch them.

"White Jack will be ready at any time," said Red Jack, as he turned with the mule.

The only response received by the Indian was a flashing of young eyes and a shake of a head.

Red Jack led the White Jack across the square, and turned unmolested down one of the straggling streets.

He kept on to the end of the mountain camp, or where the real shades of the night began.

Beyond the limits of Deadset lay the mines to which Link lay claim, according to the terms of Colonel Quartz's will.

There they were—mines producing ore in marvelous quantity; ore which in some places could be had for the picking up.

And they belonged to Captain Grip, or, at least, he claimed them after the manner of the lion who takes and holds the whole deer from the lesser beasts.

Did Red Jack, the outlawed red-skin, think of these things while he led the White Jack toward the mines?

Probably the half-civilized Indian did not think of any of these things as he passed down the mine trail, and at last he stopped at the foot of the rugged hill into which led a cavernous opening large enough to accommodate both him and the mule.

Red Jack looked cautiously about him before entering, but at last he did so with the bridle in his hand.

The white mule followed without fear, and presently, in the darkness beyond the opening, stood the pair, amid a silence that seemed touchable.

Red Jack patted the neck of the mule and turned back.

The White Jack remained in the passage.

Five minutes later the Indian came back. He found the White Jack where he had left him, and stopped there again.

Red Jack threw off a skin that hung over his shoulders, and smoothed his naked limbs with his dark hands.

He stripped still further, until he was almost naked, and wore little more than the traditional breech-clout of his people.

He even took from his hair a feather which he wore there, and at last went toward the opening.

He crept out of the mine and glided back toward Deadset proper.

Nothing more was seen of him till after midnight.

Then Mina, who looked out of Dangerous Dot's door—the child, young as she was, was on guard—saw what she thought was a log of wood leaning against a shanty three doors away.

She had never seen it there before, and the night was so big with events that the girl of Deadset wondered what the log meant.

Even as she looked it moved, going toward the square, and her eyes followed it until it was lost to sight.

Once she got a fair look at it, and she saw the well-chiseled limbs, denuded of all clothing, and with a cry she turned back and sprang to Dot's side.

"There's a naked Indian in the camp!" she said.

Dot, but half asleep, was up in a moment. "Shooting Sam?" she cried.

"No; it was a taller man than Shooting Sam. I saw him fairly but once; but he was not Sam."

Dot went to the door, but saw nothing.

By that time the Indian had neared the most important house in Deadset.

He listened at the door, and hearing no sounds, looked up and surveyed the house.

In another five minutes something dropped to the floor on the inside of Captain Grip's domicile, and Red Jack was inside the fort of the common foe.

CHAPTER XV. ROBBED.

In the darkest hour that precedes the dawn there passed over Deadset one of those storms that shake the very foundations of the mountains, as it were, and tears great forests up by their roots, hurling the strongest trees about like ninepins.

For a few minutes it seemed as though Deadset was to be leveled with the ground, but the cyclone passed on, and the first streaks of day revealed its work.

Terrible as the tempest was, it did not cause the men of the mountain camp to forget that it was fighting for its very existence, and that Captain Grip was making the battle of his life, and against a boy at that.

The Boy from Denver heard the storm and stood at his window, which overlooked the square, waiting for the last blow, and eagerly longing for the dawn which was to test the strength of the cool opposition led by the determined Captain Grip.

Sleeping on a couch in his little chamber, without blankets, lay Shooting Sam.

The red-skin had heard the storm, but if had not disturbed him.

Shooting Sam was the coolest man in Deadset—cooler than his master, who at that very moment occupied his own room with blanched cheeks.

Captain Grip was alone.

In a few moments he would go out to cross arms for the last time with the young disturber of his peace; he would walk from the house to lose the game, or to walk back more the Czar of Deadset than ever.

He saw the objects which the morning light revealed, and caught sight of the first men on the wreck-strewn square.

He was turning from the room, when the door opened and Yellow Merle came in.

Captain Grip turned to his man for the first news from without, and the heavy boots of the yellow pard smote the floor madly as he came forward.

"Where's the boy?" asked Captain Grip.

"Where he was last night—up at the hotel."

"He has made no start, then?"

"Not a start."

"Think you he intends to brave it out?"

"It looks that way."

Captain Grip seemed to swallow hard, and he walked to the nearest door, which he jerked open with a curse.

"Sam, this way!" he called.

The Indian heard, and was on his feet in an instant.

"Get ready. We go out and present a fair front. The boy is here yet."

"I said he would stay, Cap'n."

Flushed, Captain Grip opened a drawer in the little table and took out a revolver.

The eyes of the Indian followed him, and

as he thrust the shining weapon into his pocket, Shooting Sam said:

"He is armed, too."

"Of course. But our hands are quick, eh, Sam?"

"They are quick."

"The men are not to be beggared by a boy."

"They like Deadset."

"That's true. It is good enough for them. They can't be scared away by a boy."

"But Sam says that the boy has new friends."

The Captain started.

"New friends," he echoed. "Who are they?"

"Burly Burt for one."

"The giant from Sunset—the man who came here a year ago as poor as Lazarus, and sick?"

"Yes."

"So he has become the boy's champion. Who else sides with the young interloper?"

"Arizona Tom."

"Well?"

"Mountain Matt, Denver Charley, Boulder Boss—"

"It is false!"

"Cap'n Grip should have been abroad last night."

"Were you out, Sam?"

The Indian dropped his head.

"Then, you did not run across your friend, Mina?"

There was a half-hidden sneer in the Captain's tone, and he looked at Yellow Merle with a sidelong glance.

"I did not see her last night. I did not look for the girl who shoots."

"Nor Dangerous Dot, either?"

"Nor the woman who hates Cap'n Grip. I know that a conclave was held."

"Where?"

"In Mountain Matt's cabin."

"At what time?"

"It was past the middle of the night."

"Before the storm?"

"It broke up just as the first drops fell."

Captain Grip was interested.

He dropped into the arm-chair at the table and looked eagerly at Shooting Sam.

"Tell me about it, and we will mark every man!"

Sam folded his arms, as was his habit, and leaned against the wall.

"Tell me all, and listen with me, Merle. I don't want you to miss a word."

"It was at midnight that they came together there, the pards I have mentioned, with Burly Burt."

"The boy has won them over to his cause through Burt, and they pledged each other to stand by the white boy to-day."

"I know they were there. I know that Bronson talked about the will and the map; that he told the men whom he met at the shanty that the will was genuine, and that the map would be in their hands to-day."

"What fools they were to believe that," exclaimed Captain Grip. "In their hands to-day?" and he laughed as his eyes wandered to a certain spot on the wall opposite his chair.

He knew where the map was.

"Bronson talked to them at least an hour, and they pledged him that the boy should have a chance to prove the will, and that they would all stand by him."

"Which means that they intend to sow the seeds of dissension among my men," hissed Captain Grip. "Look, boys! The sun has just tipped the horizon, and we must to work!"

Just then the door opened, and the well-known figure of Tucson Tony made its appearance.

Captain Grip turned at once upon his right bower.

"You have just come from the seat of war, Tony. What is the latest?"

"Dot has just gone to the hotel."

"To my hotel?"

"The boy calls it his, you know."

"Hang the boy! To-day proves whose it is forever. The woman has gone thither, you say?"

"Yes; Mina is there, too."

At mention of the girl's name the Indian started a little.

"The White Jack has been found in the Running Nag Mine."

"Oh, the other Indian must have stabled him there."

"Perhaps. But the Indian himself, Red Jack, you know, is at the hotel."

"The crows are gathering for exile and doom," cried Captain Grip. "Go out and call the pards together. Stay! I will go myself. I promised the boy that I would to-day drive him out of Deadset with the will in his hands. The map is ours."

"You are sure of that, Captain?"

"Of course."

"They don't feel uneasy about it."

"I'll show you all!" and the gold-bug sprang across the room, halting at the wall, against which he placed his right hand as he turned triumphantly toward his friends.

"It is here!" he resumed, tapping the wall. "Don't think I would sleep soundly nights if I thought it unsafe for a moment. I guarded it last night, or ever since it came back from Dot's shanty."

He struck the wall at a certain place and a door flew open. It revealed an opening large enough to receive a human hand, and into it went the Captain's brown fingers.

All at once the hand was withdrawn and its owner threw his body toward the wall.

"It is gone!" he gasped.

The three spectators exchanged glances and a grim smile seemed to take instant possession of Shooting Sam's face.

"The thief has found it," cried Captain Grip. "It was there last night. I put it there myself."

"Even after I told you to make ashes of it?"

"But I thought it safe there. Who knew aught of the hole in the wall but we three?"

There was no response.

"Where is the traitor? Some one has robbed me, and that person must have turned traitor to do so."

Shooting Sam glanced toward the robbed treasury and Yellow Merle nodded at Captain Grip.

In another instant the Gold-bug of Deadset had thrown himself upon the Indian, but he was hurled across the room as if he were a child.

"Sam robs no one, fool!" hissed the red-skin, coolly. "The thief came in just before the storm. He saw you hide the map and he knew where to find it with his red fingers."

"His red fingers?"

Sam said nothing, but turned away with bitten lips.

CHAPTER XVI. THE END OF IT ALL.

If Shooting Sam witnessed the theft of the map he had done nothing to stop the plunderer.

Captain Grip looked daggers at the Indian, but made no further move toward him, and had to content himself with looking at the men, Yellow Merle and Tucson Tony, who watched the course of events.

"Come!" suddenly cried the Nabob of Deadset. "Let us go out and show our hand."

A singular glitter took possession of the red-skin's eyes, but he made no move, and Captain Grip and his friends left the house.

The time for the ejectment had come. The new day had broken over Deadset.

The bright light fell upon the Black Bear and upon its loafers as well.

Spanish Jim, the landlord, saw his master coming and met him on the porch, his face eager to impart something which could not be very good news for Captain Grip.

"I'm afraid the jig is up, Captain," said Jim, his little face seeming to grow darker as he spoke. "The hotel stands north of the line, you know, and—"

"What if it does?" broke in the Captain. "This day determines whether Deadset lives or dies. Where's the boy?"

"He's just walked down yonder with Bronson."

The three men exchanged looks.

With Burly Burt? That meant an alliance and Captain Grip seemed to bite his lips through.

"Come! We will meet the storm now or play coward the rest of our lives."

At this moment there came from their right a cry which stopped the trio.

Standing in the doorway of a shanty was seen a man whose tall, half grotesque figure was caught by the light strong and penetrating.

It was Burly Bronson himself.

He advanced toward Captain Grip and his pards with his hand lifted and his face seamed with eagerness.

"The boy is here," said Bronson.

"In the shanty?"

"In my cabin, or in what is his, now."

Captain Grip turned in that direction and stopped at the door. Lucky Link was there, and the moment the eyes of the man saw him he covered him with his dark hand.

"It is daylight, boy. You can choose your road. It is eternal exile."

The boy, standing in the middle of Bronson's cabin, did not move.

"You heard me?" ejaculated Captain Grip. "I give you the command to vacate. You will go."

With this he turned quickly and was walking back.

Yellow Merle and Tony had not advanced to the shanty, but had heard the orders.

"You heard it, Lucky Link?" said Bronson.

A smile passed over the Denver boy's face and he came out into the light of morning and looked after the three.

"Captain Grip!"

The Czar of Deadset stopped and turned half way round.

"What is it?"

"You have the map, you say? You hold in your hand the map which you say proves that Colonel Quartz did not give me the right property."

What could he say? The map had vanished—vanished in the storm, and he knew not the name of the plunderer.

"Produce the map," continued Link. "Show that what you have asserted is true—that Colonel Quartz gave away one foot of land which did not belong to him, and that foot shall be the property of its present tenant."

Captain Grip looked nonplused.

"Your thief stole the map."

"My thief?" smiled the boy. "Pray, when did he invade your den, Captain Grip?"

It was a confession of weakness and the Captain saw it as soon as made.

"Come," muttered Yellow Merle. "Come or drop the boy."

These words seemed to act like a match to a fuse.

They drove the hand of Captain Grip to his hip, but the revolver that rested there was not permitted to be drawn.

Across the street spoke a weapon and the hand that held it was seen just too late for either Merle or Tony to interfere.

The hand of Captain Grip fell at his side and the wounded man recoiled with a sharp cry of pain.

He had been winged and the face that he saw behind the smoking weapon was that of Mina, the ward of Dangerous Dot, a child almost in stature, but a heroine in everything else.

In another moment it seemed that all Deadset was on the street.

As if the shot had been the signal, men poured from every shanty, and in the light of early morning they ranged themselves in line, rough men in dark woollen shirts and armed to the teeth.

Captain Grip looked at them all and saw the three men mentioned by Shooting Sam as having turned against him.

"Let the boy go and all will be well," cried the cool head of Deadset. "This camp is too small for both of us and the men of Deadset will not be robbed by a kid with a forged will at his command."

The words fell upon empty air.

The giant figure of Burt Bronson was seen to lurch forward as the last word left the Captain's lips and it stopped within a few feet of the once powerful man of Deadset.

"I am no man's champion," said Burt, his hand resting upon his hip. "I am no man's slave, but right is right. There was a time when the late Colonel Quartz owned the land where stands the shanties of Deadset. I dispute the title of no man to the spot now, but who sent Colonel Quartz into the mountain, and who left him in Death Canyon tied to a rock, like one you read about of old, with the vultures to pick his heart out as he slowly died of thirst, where not a drop of water falls the year round?"

"It is false!" hissed the white-faced man who stood between Merle and Tony with blood dripping from his wounded hand.

"I say who left Colonel Quartz there to die the death of the tied dog in the deserted camp? Was it one who loved the man? Was it the man whom he befriended years before? I am not here to answer. The man, if he hears me, knows."

Captain Grip seemed to groan with rage, for he fell back, only to stop and dig his heels into the sand.

"If the map is in his hands let him burn it or give it up. He says it was stolen. Who would steal it from Captain Grip?"

A derisive laugh fell from the lips of the men who stood looking upon this scene and the pards of the Czar of Deadset looked at the line without hope.

"Aye" suddenly cried Captain Grip, and it looked like the last play of the desperate man, "who indeed stole the map which proves that the will is false? Who entered the room where it was kept and carried it off? Let the boy forger say, if he dares, that his hand has not already burned the map in order to make firmer the ground upon which he stands."

"The map is not in my hands," said Lucky Link. "I sent no man after it. I told no one to rob you, Captain Grip. If the thief came last night it was without my approval."

"That's the red and the White Jack now!"

Sure enough, down the straggling street came the gaunt Indian leading the White Jack by the rein.

Red Jack looked at the lined street and drew up in front of the shanty before which was being enacted the scene we have witnessed.

All eyes seemed to read the Indian through, and he looked first at the three men and their meagre backing and then at Lucky Link and his following.

"The white eagle of the mines must

guard his maps better if he wants to save them from the red hawk."

With a cry Captain Grip turned to Yellow Merle and those nearest might have heard his teeth crack as they met with rage.

The left hand of the deposed Czar of Deadset seized the wrist of the dark-faced fellow and he said hoarsely:

"I have found the thief. Give me the revolver, Merle."

But the pard jerked back, and, disappointed, Captain Grip turned again to the Indian in time to see him jerk from beneath his waist-belt a bit of discolored stuff which he held aloft.

"The map is here! If it saves the white eagle of the mines he should rejoice. If it talks for the Boy from Denver the white eagle must go."

For a moment Captain Grip looked at the Indian in the middle of the street, and his gaze lowered madly.

"Come! We will make the fight when I have dressed my hand. The day of vengeance has not yet dawned."

But he had spoke too late.

The day of revenge for him was over, and when he shut behind him the door of his house, he heard a shout which made him turn and listened with blanched cheeks.

That day yet a little company of men rode from the camp.

Mounted upon a white mule sat sullen and grim-faced the man who for months had been the Czar of Deadset.

It was better than the vengeance of blood; it was better than a tragic ending to the drama he had played with all the coolness of a fiend.

The map confirmed the will; it showed the property belonging to the late Colonel Quartz of Denver, the man left by Captain Grip to die on the vulture-haunted canyon, but who was rescued by Lucky Link some time before the opening of our romance of the mines and their tragic events; but the mercy of the boy intervened, and instead of the vengeance of the noose, Captain Grip and his adherents were permitted to go into eternal exile.

As for Shooting Sam, the Indian, he was already gone, but the next day Dangerous Dot vanished also, only to return to Deadset a month later with a story of vengeance which she told to no one but little Mina.

The Boy from Denver took possession of his legacy; he was kind to those who remained, and Deadset, instead of becoming a one-boy town, as some predicted it would, grew and grew until its mines reached the climax of prosperity, and until Captain Grip—killed afterward by an old foe—and his fight for life and property were forgotten.

Time came when Mina, grown into a tall, beautiful girl, became the young bride of the now truly Lucky Link, and at the wedding, which became the nine days' wonder of the hills, the form of Burly Burt towered over all the guests, and near by stood the gaunt figure of the map stealer, Red Jack.

Prosperity followed the Denver boy's fight for his rights, and to-day there wanders through the pasture land adjoining Deadset a white mule with a history, for he returned to the camp after carrying Captain Grip into exile, as if he had a part in the good fortunes of the camp and its young promoter!

THE END.

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